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**Citation: Lennard-Brown, Sarah (2021) Almshouses of London and Westminster: their role in lay piety and the relief of poverty, 1330-1600. [Thesis] (Unpublished)**

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# Almshouses of London and Westminster: their role in lay piety and the relief of poverty, 1330-1600

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Thesis submitted for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

Birkbeck College

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September 2020

# Declaration of authorship

I, Sarah Marion Lennard-Brown, hereby declare that the research presented in this thesis is entirely my own work carried out for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at the Birkbeck College, University of London, and has not been submitted in any previous application for a higher degree.

Signed:

Date: 27th September 2020

# Abstract

This thesis examines the birth and early years of a new institution, the almshouse, in the late-medieval and early-modern City of London and Westminster. Almshouses, small, poor institutions, have been sadly neglected in favour of the study of larger, better documented hospitals. But almshouses were important, sitting figuratively and literally at the heart of the community. This thesis examines what motivated the foundation of almshouses and their role in physical and spiritual health and the support of the elderly and disabled in London. It also investigates how almshouses functioned as an institution and their social and spiritual role within the urban community and it places them in the wider context of institutions in Europe. Evidence from fifty-two foundations has been analysed, from small poor parish almshouses to larger, more elaborate establishments, including those founded by lay people, royalty, religious organisations, and City Companies. A wide range of sources has been identified and a gazetteer produced. This thesis demonstrates that almshouses were complex institutions that aimed to ensure the continuing well-being of the founders, administrators, residents, and local community. They were carefully designed to promote spiritual and bodily health and reduce poverty and gave residents the opportunity to engage in a spiritual pilgrimage of study, prayer, and contemplation. Almspeople represented an active link between the communities of the living and the dead within the urban arena and played a visible role in the civic ceremony of the city. Within a wider European context almshouses represented a localised variation of the specialisation of hospitals that was taking place across the whole of Europe at this time. This study informs our understanding of the development of specialised hospitals, social policy and poor relief in the medieval and Tudor periods and extends our knowledge about the exercise of urban lay piety and charity.

# Acknowledgements

I am indebted to many people for their help, support, and advice throughout the research and writing of this thesis. The inspiration for the study of the almshouses of London originated during Professor John Henderson's Patients' and Practitioners course, which I studied as part of my Master's degree at Birkbeck College. I am incredibly grateful to Professor John Henderson for giving me the opportunity to research further into this fascinating subject and to Professor Vanessa Harding for helping me understand more about the workings of the medieval and early-modern City of London. They have been wonderful supervisors and I have enjoyed working with them.

Many other scholars and colleagues have been generous in their time and knowledge. I would particularly like to thank Professor Caroline Barron, who openhandedly shared her initial research and enthusiasm for the almshouses and has continued to be a great support; and members of her Medieval Seminar for welcoming me into their midst with unfailing kindness, help and interest in my research. There are many members of the Medieval Seminar, but I would particularly like to thank Peter Brown, Caroline Metcalf, Anne Clarke, Dr Jane Williams, Dr Ann Bowtell, Grahame Javes, Dr Christine Fox, and Dr Doreen Leach for their help and listening ears. Other scholars have also been a great help in my journey including Professor Carole Rawcliffe, Professor Luke Demaitre, Professor Peregrine Horden, Jane Toms, Dr Hannelore Frank, and Dr Anne Paton.

Jane Brookes, Val Mayes, and Emma Mills have been the best of stalwart friends and kept me going through good and bad times with kindness, love, good sense, and tea.

I am immeasurably grateful to my parents Maureen and Ray Lennard-Brown who taught me to be curious and never give up. To my sister Deborah Jackson for being interested and a listening ear, to my sons Tom and Bram for their support and encouragement, and most of all to my husband Matthew Williams, who has given me the space and time to do the research, is always willing to visit an almshouse, helped immeasurably with the maps and graphics, and has carried on loving and supporting me through thick and thin.

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# Abbreviations

<b>BL</b>	British Library
<b>CCA</b>	The Clothworkers' Company Archive
<b><i>Endowed Charities</i></b>	Charity Commissioners of Great Britain, <i>The Endowed Charities of the City of London: reprinted at large from seventeen reports of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities</i> (London, 1829)
<b><i>Cal. of Wills in Ct. of Husting</i></b>	<i>Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, AD 1258-1688</i> , ed. R. R. Sharpe, 2 vols (London, 1890)
<b>GA</b>	Guildhall Archive, London
<b><i>Jordan, Charities</i></b>	W. K. Jordan, <i>The Charities of London 1480 – 1660</i> (London, 1960)
<b>LMA</b>	London Metropolitan Archive
<b><i>OED</i></b>	<i>Oxford English Dictionary</i> , 3rd edit. September 2012, < <a href="http://0-www.oed.com.catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk">http://0-www.oed.com.catalogue.urls.lon.ac.uk</a> > [accessed 10 <sup>th</sup> March 2015]
<b><i>Stow, Survey</i></b>	John Stow, <i>A Survey of London</i> (Stroud, 2009)
<b>TNA</b>	The National Archives
<b>VCH</b>	Victoria County History
<b>WAM</b>	Westminster Abbey Muniments

# Chapter One: Introduction: Almshouses in London and Westminster

‘...which blessed worke of harbouring the harbourlesse, is promised to  
be rewarded in the kingdome of heauen’<sup>1</sup>

This thesis examines the development of almshouses within the City of London and Westminster during the late-medieval and Tudor periods. Almshouses have been built in England and Wales continuously since late-medieval times and they remain a common feature of the modern built environment. The longevity of the almshouse institution is a testament to its ability to adapt to changing circumstances and requirements down the ages. It also indicates an institution that plays a core, but understated role in the fabric of society. Despite, or perhaps, because of, this position at the centre of the community, almshouses have been neglected or disparaged as an area of academic study. G. A. Lee expressed this disdain for almshouses by referring to them dismissively as ‘merely almshouses’.<sup>2</sup>

The fact that almshouses are small does not mean that they are unimportant. The examination of the genesis of this institution, its economic foundations and its early adaptation to changing circumstances can tell us much about the motivations of founders, contemporary attitudes to poverty, and the understanding of the physical, spiritual and social needs of the people who lived in almshouses, the founders and the local community. Peregrine Horden emphasised the importance of understanding the role of small institutions, such as almshouses, by comparing institutions of varying sizes, geography and political and economic importance in order to place ‘broad descriptions or explanations of change’ in their proper context and shed light on themes such as ‘lay control, centralisation and confinement’.<sup>3</sup> This is a point of view supported by Clive Burgess who felt that these complex institutions make better sense

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<sup>1</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 181.

<sup>2</sup> G. A. Lee, ‘The Leper hospitals of Leinster’, *Journal of the County Kildare Archaeological Society*, 14 (1966), p. 128.

<sup>3</sup> P. Horden, ‘A Discipline of Relevance: The Historiography of the Later Medieval hospital’, *Social History of Medicine* 1 (1988), p.365.

'*en masse*: their function should be taken as a whole'.<sup>4</sup> Several studies have examined the foundation and establishment of individual almshouses during the medieval and Tudor periods in the City of London and Westminster.<sup>5</sup> The aim of this study is to investigate almshouses within this geographical area: examine the implications of changes to the built form and social space, the motivations of their founders, contemporary understanding of their role in comparison with other parts of England and Europe, and how this evolved during the period 1330 - 1600.

In this chapter I will analyse the meaning and interpretation of the term 'almshouse', as to how it was understood during the late-Middle Ages and Tudor period and survey the historiography of early almshouses and other historical issues that can be illuminated by their study in this geographic area. This includes the expression and understanding of charity and piety among Londoners, attitudes to poverty and contemporary concepts of health, healing and wellbeing embodied in the built form and administration of almshouses. I will then look at the types of sources that can shed light on the foundation and life of early almshouses. Lastly, I will introduce the key questions addressed by this thesis and the structure of the following research.

## 1.1 What is an Almshouse?

The term 'alms' has a complex etymology, with roots in both Latin and Greek. In Latin the word derives from *elemosina*, *elemosina* or *eleemosyna* meaning a charitable gift or charitable giving, benefaction, pity and compassion, or a grant of land in support of a Church. The Greek roots of the word 'alms' come from *ἐλεημοσύνη* meaning pity, mercy or charity and *ἐλεήμων* meaning compassionate or merciful.<sup>6</sup> Because of this complex meaning the terms 'alms men' and 'alms women', now commonly used to describe the residents of almshouses, originally referred to either the giver of alms or the receiver. The term 'alms' shares this duality of meaning with the Latin word *hospes*

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<sup>4</sup> C. Burgess, 'London, The Church and The Kingdom', in M. Davies and A. Prescott eds., *London and The Kingdom, Essays in Honour of Caroline M. Barron* Harlaxton Medieval Studies XVI (Donington, 2008), p. 102.

<sup>5</sup> Christine Fox, 'The Royal Almshouse at Westminster c.1500-c.1600' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2012); Jean Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington* (London, 1968).

<sup>6</sup> *OED*

which was used to refer to host, guest and stranger.<sup>7</sup> This ambiguity of definition illustrates the complexity of the role, as almsmen and women could be simultaneously both receivers and givers of alms (or they could be individually the receiver of alms or the giver of alms).<sup>8</sup> The term embraced both roles which implies they had a similar social value so that there was no need to distinguish between them. This ambiguity reflects the complex symbiotic social relationships that existed in the late-medieval and Tudor periods, when wealth and wellbeing could quickly turn to poverty and sickness for anybody, high or low born, and the poor could be seen as a physical embodiment of the risen Christ, a concept that was gradually eroded during those periods.<sup>9</sup> The term initially included people who lived in almshouses, but, unlike now, it was not exclusively applied to them.<sup>10</sup>

The definition of almshouses is also complex. As with the term 'hospital,' the meaning of the word has evolved down the centuries and the modern understanding of an almshouse may be quite different to the way the concept was understood in the Middle Ages. The *OED* provides two definitions of the term 'almshouse':

1. Originally: a house for the accommodation or support of the poor or needy; especially a house (often one of a group) established for this purpose in a particular parish or municipality.
2. A house in a monastery, convent, etc., for the accommodation of guests or from which alms were distributed.<sup>11</sup>

The second use, 'a house in a monastery' points towards one of the key inspirations for almshouses.<sup>12</sup> The *OED* gives a date of first recorded use of this definition as 1440, but some poor people were resident in monastic almonries well before this date. Barbara Harvey noted that some paupers were resident in the almonry at Westminster Abbey from the mid-twelfth century, referred to in the accounts as *pauperes elemosinarie*. She also noted that there was clear evidence of poor people resident in the almonry at

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<sup>7</sup> James Morwood, ed., *Oxford Latin Desk Dictionary*, (Oxford, 2005) p. 85.

<sup>8</sup> *OED*, The *OED* gives the example of the Grocers' Guild accounts referring to both givers and receivers of alms as almsmen. This duality of meaning also applies to hospitality.

<sup>9</sup> Miri Rubin, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (Cambridge, 1987), p. 18.

<sup>10</sup> *OED*, Almsmen.

<sup>11</sup> *OED*, Almshouse.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid*.

Reading Abbey from the early thirteenth century, and therefore it could be argued that almonries were ‘...becoming hospitals of a kind’.<sup>13</sup>

The earliest source of the first *OED* definition of ‘almshouses’ is recorded in the ‘Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards’ in 1395.<sup>14</sup> The text reads:

‘[Special prayers for dead men’s souls] þis is þe false ground of almesse dede, on þe qwiche alle almes houses of Ingelond ben wikkidly igrounded.’<sup>15</sup>

The text is found in the seventh conclusion which equates gifts to priests and almshouses in return for prayers for the dead with simony. There are several interesting features of this text. Firstly, it refers to almshouses as a common institution, which implies there were many in existence by 1395. Secondly the text identifies intercession for the dead (special prayers for dead men’s souls) as a key occupation of hospitals and almshouses, and thirdly it appears to use the term almshouse as an umbrella term for hospitals, which were more prominent exponents of intercession for the dead at the time, a concept that was championed 500 years later by Rotha Mary Clay.<sup>16</sup>

The first work of substance to include a discussion of almshouses was *The Mediaeval Hospitals* by Rotha Mary Clay published in 1909. Clay was of the opinion that almshouses were just one of a variety of names for institutions of charitable hospitality, such as medieval hospitals, *maisons dieu*, *leprosaria* and hostels for pilgrims. These institutions she described as ecclesiastical in nature (though she excluded monastic hospitals from her study) and focused on care rather than cure: ‘relief of the body where possible, but predominantly for the refreshment of the soul’.<sup>17</sup> She proceeded to differentiate charitable hospital provision in towns where there might be a number of different institutions:

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<sup>13</sup> Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England 1100-1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford, 1996), pp. 17-18.

<sup>14</sup> *OED*

<sup>15</sup> H. Cronin, ‘Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards’, *English Historical Review*, 22. 86 (1907), p. 229.

<sup>16</sup> Rotha Mary Clay, *The Mediaeval Hospitals of England* (London, 1909), p. xviii.

<sup>17</sup> *Ibid.*

‘...infirmiry-almshouse for the sick and helpless... hostel for passing pilgrims... and... outside the walls there would be at least one leper-hospital.’<sup>18</sup>

This finer level of analysis equated almshouses with infirmaries as places to treat the sick rather than wayfarer hostels and *maisons dieu*, which she described as places for pilgrims to rest and recuperate.<sup>19</sup> This classification becomes more opaque in the body of her book. Chapter One is titled ‘Hospitals for Wayfarers and the Sick’ and looked at hostels for pilgrims which included some *maisons dieu* and infirmaries for the sick. In Chapter Two, ‘Homes for the Feeble and Destitute,’ are called indiscriminately ‘hospital, *maison dieu*, almshouse or bedehouse.’<sup>20</sup> She found no difficulty, however, in discriminating between two other types of institution, hospitals for the insane and *leprosaria*. For Clay, the most important differentiating factors of an institution were its function and the classification of people assisted by the charity, rather than its architectural form.

The medieval ambiguity about the nomenclature of hospitals has been an enduring stumbling-block for historians attempting to analyse these institutions. W. H Godfrey’s 1935 book on medieval almshouses accepted Clay’s idea of an almshouse as ostensibly the same institution as hospitals, *leprosaria*, *maisons dieu*, etc., as a starting-point but then proceeded to analyse its physical evolution.<sup>21</sup> Eventually he settled on classifying institutions by their architectural form. ‘Infirmaries’ and ‘isolation wards’ were classified as a single or double hall with an attached chapel, occasionally single hall with a separate chapel. Almshouses, which had separate dwellings for almspeople, were described as ‘collegiate’ in design.<sup>22</sup>

Orme and Webster continued the ‘form versus function’ debate in their definition of almshouses, by emphasising the importance of function, care of the poor and sick, and highlighting the difficulties of differentiating between the general function of hospitals and almshouses. They described the evolution of the function of hospitals and

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<sup>18</sup> Clay, *Medieval Hospitals*, p. xix.

<sup>19</sup> Clay, *Medieval Hospitals*, p. 15.

<sup>20</sup> Clay, *Medieval Hospitals*, p. 15.

<sup>21</sup> W. H. Godfrey, *The English Almshouse: With some Account of its Predecessor, the Medieval Hospital* (London, 1935).

<sup>22</sup> Godfrey, *The English Almshouse*, pp.45, 51 – Cobham College, p. 59 - Sackville College and p. 63 - Bromley College, all of which are almshouses.

almshouses over time. However, they too eventually resorted to using form as a method of differentiation between institutions, noting a trend during the fourteenth century to build smaller institutions characterised by individual living accommodation for inmates that increasingly tended to be called almshouses.<sup>23</sup> This emphasis on the evolution of form continued to receive support from writers with a background in architecture, such as Brian Howson, and historian Elizabeth Prescott who differentiated almshouses from hospitals by architecture and size.<sup>24</sup> In 2001 Elaine Phillips also focussed on the architectural differences between hospitals and almshouses, but qualified this by stating that, unlike hospitals, almshouses tended to be founded by lay people and were more discriminating about who they would admit.<sup>25</sup> Other recent commentators, such as Rawcliffe and Horden, continued to champion the central importance of function. In 2013 Carole Rawcliffe gave a broad definition of almshouses as 'providers of residential care'.<sup>26</sup> Marjorie McIntosh held steadfastly to the middle ground in this debate, proposing that medieval almshouses evolved in both form and function from medieval hospitals, and discussed the complexities of form, function and role, and the confounding issue of institutions which do not appear to adhere to this evolutionary model.<sup>27</sup>

It seems that when investigating medieval almshouses one is presented with a tangled mass of institutions, complex and simple, all with similarities and differences that appear to defy attempts to define them. This was also an issue for an earlier commentator, John Strype, in his 1720 updated edition of Stow's *A Survey of London*, who defined every 'grand' institution that provided hospitality for the poor along with other charitable activities, as a hospital. He included in this definition individual charitable dwellings for the poor, which were traditionally more commonly called almshouses, such as Aske's, the Haberdashers' Almshouse and the Ironmongers'

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<sup>23</sup> N. Orme and M. Webster, *The English Hospital 1050 - 1570* (New Haven and London, 1995), pp. 136-138.

<sup>24</sup> Brian Howson, *Houses of Noble Poverty: A History of the English Almshouse* (Sunbury-on-Thames, 1993); Brian Howson, *Almshouses: A social and architectural history* (Stroud, 2008); Elizabeth Prescott, *The English Medieval Hospital 1050-1640* (Trowbridge, 1992).

<sup>25</sup> Elaine Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions in Norfolk and Suffolk c 1350-1600' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of East Anglia, 2001), pp. vi-vii.

<sup>26</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies: Communal Health in Late Medieval English Towns and Cities* (Woodbridge, 2013), p. 321; Horden, 'A Discipline of Relevance', p. 365.

<sup>27</sup> Marjorie McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England 1350 - 1600* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 61.

Almshouse.<sup>28</sup> To confuse things further he referred to these institutions as hospitals in name, but calls them almshouses in their description, which at least has the merit of being consistent. However, John Stow himself, writing in 1598, was a firm adherent of the 'form' definition of an almshouse. The institutions he called 'proper almshouses', consisted of separate dwellings for poor people, often collegiate in form and constructed as part of a larger work of charity.<sup>29</sup> The institutions he referred to interchangeably as hospitals or almshouses were often older institutions, which had built almshouses in addition to their traditional single hall and chapel (such as St Anthony of Vienne or St Katharine's), or had converted a single hall and chapel into separate accommodation.<sup>30</sup> These institutions also incorporated a number of charitable activities in addition to providing for the poor. By way of contrast, Stow recorded the provision of living accommodation for the poor in certain parishes, which he did not define as hospitals or almshouses. These buildings, such as the lodging for choir men in the parish Church of St Michael's, Cornhill, he described as:

...charitably appoynted for receipt of auncient decayed parishioners, namely widowes, such as were not able to beare the charge of greater rents abroad, which blessed worke of harbouring the harbourlesse, is promised to be rewarded in the kingdome of heauen.<sup>31</sup>

This type of accommodation was often built around, in or close to the parish Churchyard and does not appear to be part of a larger charitable scheme. However, it does have similarities with the accommodation legislated for in the 1547 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and the Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons, which established cottages for the poor and aged in every parish. Although others called these establishments almshouses, John Stow clearly did not.

Given the ambiguity regarding the definition of almshouses in the sources, it is useful instead to think about which features most of these institutions have in common. The

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<sup>28</sup> John Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster an updated edition of the original A Survey of London by John Stow* (1720), <<http://www.hrionline.ac.uk/strype/>> [accessed 3<sup>rd</sup> January 2015]

<sup>29</sup> The word proper is defined in the *OED* in several ways but at this time it was in use as 'Strictly or accurately so called; in the strict use of the word; genuine, real'. Stow, *Survey*, p. 140, referring to Milbourne's almshouses and p.159, referring to the Parish Clerks' Almshouse.

<sup>30</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 168, refers to St Anthony's as both a hospital and an almshouse.

<sup>31</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 181.



first and most obvious of these is indeed the built form. The living accommodation provided by almshouses typically had individual dwelling spaces for residents, often within a larger building complex, sometimes with communal areas for eating, often close to or including a Church or chapel. There is also a marked difference in the way new almshouses were named in the fifteenth century. Often the establishments bore the name of a founder or the craft guild, who were responsible for the running of the institution. Whittington's College and Almshouse is a good example of this, as it was founded in 1424 following a deathbed bequest by Richard Whittington. Stow often mentions almshouses in his survey of London, talking about them in terms of a memorial to the founder.<sup>32</sup>

A second defining aspect of an almshouse relates to the level of need of almshouse residents. Generally, residents of hospitals for the poor and infirm were much less physically able than those who lived in almshouses. Almshouses were for the impotent, but self-caring, poor who were expected to be resident for a longer period of time. These were people who were unable to earn their living due to age, disease, or disability. The level of care provided by hospitals and almshouses was also quite different. Hospitals were often staffed by religious or lay brethren who looked after the needs of the residents. Almshouses, on the other hand either provided no physical care or care was limited and provided by one or two women hired to cook food and wash clothes. Any resident of an almshouse whose needs increased might be looked after by other residents. The numbers of residents is also an area of contrast; almshouses tended to cater for smaller numbers of people. For example, St Giles' Hospital, Norwich, had thirty beds for the sick poor, whereas Whittington's Almshouse only catered for thirteen 'poor folks'.<sup>33</sup> Larger hospitals, such as St Leonard's in York, looked after hundreds of poor sick people on a daily basis.<sup>34</sup> Almshouses tended to be more modest in nature, usually catering for approximately twelve residents.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> John Stow talks about almshouses in the context of their founders, Stow, *Survey*, p. 215.

<sup>33</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul, The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital* (1999, Stroud); Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 109. For a longer discussion on the names of almshouses, see Appendix One, pp. 284-7.

<sup>34</sup> P. H. Cullum, *Cremetts and Corrodies: Care of the Poor and Sick at St Leonard's Hospital York in the Middle Ages* (York, 1991), p. 2.

<sup>35</sup> Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, and Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*.

Both hospitals and almshouses of this period were usually part of a larger charitable foundation which included some form of educational provision, prayer and often an intercessory role, all centred on the care of the soul. However, their method of administration was often different. Hospitals, such as St Giles' Norwich, were run on a day-to-day basis by a master who was a priest, with the help of assistant chaplains, and also often a college or fraternity, all of which was overseen by the bishop.<sup>36</sup> Almshouses, by contrast, were usually private institutions, run by a single tutor, master or warden, who may have been elected by (or from) the residents and overseen by a secular organisation, such as a craft guild. The financial endowment of almshouses also tended to have a different structure. Hospitals usually had one founder, but then continued to attract donations in return for spiritual services from individuals who wished to be associated with the institution throughout its active life. Almshouses, however, were often founded as a single extravagant gesture of charity by a private citizen.<sup>37</sup>

Therefore, it would appear that almshouses belong to the 'Hospital' genus of charitable institutions but are a different 'species' in terms of both their form, and function, and so can be thought of as a specialised form of hospital. Almshouses provided individual living accommodation for single people or couples within a physically defined community. The residents were usually elderly, infirm, and relatively poor, but could look after themselves when they joined the almshouse. Residents often lived together for many years in charitable community. Almshouses were usually managed on a day-to-day basis by the residents themselves, or some form of warden, with administrative support from a board of governors or a City company. Clearly there are institutions which straddle the boundaries between hospital, almshouse and poorhouse, and indeed almshouses themselves vary enormously in complexity and vision. However, in general, almshouses can be seen as a distinct group of institutions with a characteristic form and function that differentiates them from other similar charitable institutions.

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<sup>36</sup> Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, pp. 137-145.

<sup>37</sup> For further discussion on the differences between medieval hospitals and almshouses see Chapter Seven, pp. 235-239.

Having established the boundaries between almshouses and other charitable institutions such as hospitals, it is also necessary to establish the boundaries of this thesis in time and space.

## 1.2 Temporal and Spatial Boundaries

The period 1330-1600 has a particular significance in the development of almshouses. During this time many almshouses were founded and many traditional medieval hospitals were altered both in built form and purpose to resemble almshouses.<sup>38</sup> This was the era of the birth of the almshouse institution and a time of changing attitudes towards the provision of charitable hospitality to the poor and infirm.<sup>39</sup> The advantage of a longitudinal study of this nature is that it enables us to examine broad changes in institutions within the context of the religious, social, economic and political changes taking place around them. It can help establish the degree to which these changes affected people, how much change was resisted and how much it was accommodated into everyday life.

The years between 1330 and 1600 were a time of transition. They were a time of quite radical change in the nature and extent of poverty both in London and around the country, from the advent of the Black Death which had the unexpected benefit of reducing the numbers of people living in extreme poverty at the end of the fourteenth century, to a period of relative stability and then a steady rise in population which caused increasing problems with poverty from the late-fifteenth century, especially in urban areas such as London.<sup>40</sup> It was also a time of religious change, at the start of the period in the mid-fourteenth century the Catholic Church was firmly in command of religious practice in London. However, by the late fourteenth century the Lollards had challenged the religious status quo. This movement was heavily repressed during the early fifteenth century only to be followed by a resurgence of dissent with the established church by reformers such as Martin Luther, Thomas Cranmer and Thomas Cromwell early in the sixteenth century, culminating eventually with the Dissolution of

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<sup>38</sup> Orme and Webster, *The English Hospital*, pp. 136-138; McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, p. 61.

<sup>39</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, pp. 15-16; Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 18.

<sup>40</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, p. 15; Caroline Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages: Government and People 1200- 1500* (Oxford, 2004), pp. 239-242.

the Monasteries and the Reformation in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>41</sup> Throughout this period the laity became more knowledgeable about theological issues, which was encouraged by the established Church, through the confessional system, and the increasing availability of theological texts in the vernacular and the influence of the friars.<sup>42</sup> The fifteenth century was also a time of political upheaval with the Houses of Lancaster and York battling for the English throne.<sup>43</sup> Additionally, there was social and economic change during this period, with increasing amounts of wealth owned by people outside the aristocracy.<sup>44</sup> This wealth was used to change the built environment within London and beyond and these activities included the foundation and endowment of almshouses.

Along with temporal boundaries to this study there are also spatial boundaries. The geographical focus of this study is London and Westminster. London, as England's capital city was a focus for education and innovation, and it was therefore in a prime position to be at the forefront of the development of almshouses.<sup>45</sup> Because of the connection between London and trade, and its proximity to Westminster and parliament, the crown and the courts, the people of London were often the first to experience ideas and changes that would then gradually filter out to the rest of the country. The wealth of Londoners attracted young people from around the kingdom; consequently, London had a permanent inflow of immigrants and a population that was somewhat younger than the rest of the country. Many of these people who came to London were poor and stayed poor so there was a greater need for poor relief in the city than many other parts of England, even in the early fifteenth century.<sup>46</sup> The

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<sup>41</sup> Eamon Duffy, *The Stripping of the Altars: Traditional Religion in England 1400 – 1580*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edit. (London, 2005), pp. 53-77.

<sup>42</sup> Amy Appleford, *Learning to Die in London, 1380-1540* (Pennsylvania, 2015), pp. 6-9, 11-13. Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 379. Felicity Heal, Rosemary O'Day, eds., *Church and Society in England: Henry VIII to James I* (London, 1977), chs. 2, 3, 8.

<sup>43</sup> The dispute between the Royal Houses of Lancaster and York had a particular impact on the people of London who played an important role both in supporting a cause and providing loans to enable that cause to be pursued. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 27-29.

<sup>44</sup> Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, pp. 232-234.

<sup>45</sup> Caroline Barron, 'The Expansion of Education in Fifteenth-Century London', in J. Blair and B. Golding eds., *The Cloister and the World: Essays on Medieval History in Honour of Barbara Harvey* (Oxford, 1995), pp. 219-245. The literacy and education of Londoners are also discussed in Sheila Lindenbaum, 'Literate Londoners and Liturgical Change: Sarum Books in City Parishes after 1414', in Davies and Prescott, *London and the Kingdom*, pp. 384-399.

<sup>46</sup> Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 277.

population of London, while much reduced after the Black Death, still provided a larger pool of people than anywhere else in the country. W. K. Jordan's study of the charities of London found that Londoners were active both in London and in the rural communities where they were born or had a family association.<sup>47</sup> Therefore the motivations of Londoners to endow institutions like almshouses crossed the urban-rural boundary and the conclusions from this study can be argued to have wider implications. The survival of archives in London is also particularly good in comparison with many other areas of the country and Europe and a number of documents survive for many different types of almshouses.<sup>48</sup>

Gervase Rosser recorded how after 1300 the 'kingdom's centre of gravity' moved from Winchester to the political and economic centres of Westminster and London.<sup>49</sup> The presence of the crown, courts and government in Westminster and its close physical proximity to the growing economic power of the City of London, led to them gradually becoming closer and closer as the period progressed. The position of Westminster outside the gates on the western side of the City of London meant that the route from the City to Westminster became increasingly populated during the period of this study, the geographical distinction between the two areas became blurred as they gradually became a continuous urban area, and almshouses were built between the two areas. The presence of Westminster in this study also provides a counterpoint to the almshouse developments in the City of London and provides a more balanced discussion about the patterns of development across different types of almshouse foundation and administration.

### 1.3 Historiography of Almshouses

The study of a geographically related group of almshouses is useful because it can shed light on a number of key themes in medieval historiography. The first theme is the development of hospital specialisation and the foundation of almshouses in the late-medieval and Tudor periods. The historiography of hospitals is well established. Antiquarians and historians began to be interested in the history of hospitals at the

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<sup>47</sup> Jordan, *Charities*, pp. 423-430.

<sup>48</sup> See section 1.4 p. 28. For a discussion about the surviving sources relating to almshouses in London and Westminster.

<sup>49</sup> Gervase Rosser, *Medieval Westminster, 1200-1540* (Oxford, 1989), p. 114.

beginning of the twentieth century. Historians such as Maud Sellers examined the early documents relating to individual establishments, such as The Merchant Adventurers' Hospital in York.<sup>50</sup> Rotha Mary Clay published *Mediaeval Hospitals of England* in 1909. The field progressed with many studies on the chronological growth of individual institutions, leading J. R. Guy to complain that: 'Of the writing of hospital histories there is no end'.<sup>51</sup> In 1995 Nicholas Orme and Margaret Webster published *The English Hospital 1070-1570*, which was essentially an updated version of Clay's original 1909 work. However, in the late 1990s there was a transformation in the way histories of hospitals were written and studied. Scholars began to think about hospital institutions in their geographical, historical, cultural, social, economic, intellectual, and spiritual context.<sup>52</sup> Carole Rawcliffe wrote about the spiritual medicine available at St Giles's Hospital in Norwich in 1999 and in 2006 John Henderson looked at the role of the Renaissance hospital within the urban area of Florence and its influences beyond its locale.<sup>53</sup>

Since this time, the field has developed. Historians have begun to look at contemporary ideas about medicine and health and how these influenced treatment in hospitals and in the local community.<sup>54</sup> The importance of spiritual concepts such as charity, piety and purgatory and how these have influenced the practical running of

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<sup>50</sup> *The York Mercers and Merchant Adventurers 1356 – 1917*, ed. M. Sellers, (Surtees Society, CXXIX), (Durham, 1918).

<sup>51</sup> J. R. Guy, 'Of the Writing of Hospital Histories there is No End', *Bulletin of the History of Medicine*, lix (1985), pp. 415-420.

<sup>52</sup> Ludmilla Jordanova, 'Has the social history of medicine come of age?' *The Historical Journal*, 36, (1993), pp. 437-444; Horden, 'A Discipline of Relevance', p.365.; J.W Brodman, *Charity and Welfare: Hospitals and the Poor in Medieval Catalonia* (Philadelphia, 1998).

<sup>53</sup> J. Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital. Healing the Body and Healing the Soul* (New Haven, London, 2006); Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*.

<sup>54</sup> R. C. Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims: Popular Beliefs in Medieval England* (London, 1977); P. Horden, 'A non-natural environment: medicine without doctors and the medieval European hospital', in B. S. Bowers ed., *The Medieval Hospital and Medical Practice* (Farnham, 2007), pp. 133-145; P. Horden, 'Religion as Medicine: Music in Medieval Hospitals', in Peter Biller and Joseph Ziegler eds., *Religion and Medicine in the Middle Ages* (York, 2001) ch.9; K. Park, 'Healing the poor: hospitals and medical assistance in Renaissance Florence', in J. Barry and C. Jones eds., *Medicine and Charity before the Welfare State* (London, 1991), pp. 26-41; M. Pelling, 'Thoroughly Resented? Older women and their Medical Role in Early Modern London', in L. Hunter and S. Hutton eds., *Women, Science and medicine, 1500 – 1700* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 63-88; C. Rawcliffe, 'Hospital Nurses and their work', in R. Britnell ed., *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages* (Stroud, 1998), pp. 43-64; C. Rawcliffe, 'Medicine for the Soul: The Medieval English Hospital and the Quest for Spiritual Health', in J. R. Hinnells and R. Porter eds., *Religion, Health and Suffering* (London, 1999), pp. 316-338; N. G. Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine. An Introduction to Knowledge and Practice* (Chicago and London, 1990). For further information see Chapter 5, p. 150.

hospitals in different geographical and cultural situations has been explored.<sup>55</sup>

Specialised hospitals have also been studied, particularly those for leprosy. But, apart from some notable studies of individual almshouses, such as those of Henry VII, the duke and duchess of Suffolk at Ewelme and Whittington's Almshouse, and two landmark studies; one by Patricia H. Cullum of the function of the Maison Dieu and the other by Elaine Phillips of the 'Charitable Institutions of Norfolk and Suffolk' in 2001, the historiography of small, specialised institutions for the impotent and elderly in the late-medieval and Tudor periods has been neglected.<sup>56</sup>

Despite the lack of detailed analysis of the birth of the almshouse institution there are many theories about its origins. By the reign of Elizabeth I, the vast majority of new residential charitable institutions were built in the form of an almshouse. Rotha Mary Clay suggested that the stimulus for the evolution of almshouses was the Reformation, with changing religious ideas and attitudes combining with dissatisfaction with the management of older institutions such as hospitals by established religious organisations.<sup>57</sup> In her thesis of 2001 Phillips challenged this assumption, instead proposing that almshouse provision was characterised by continuity during this period and that the effects of the Black Death on local communities were a greater catalyst for change.<sup>58</sup> Phillips also suggested that lay people's increasing independence and control over their spiritual affairs was causal in the foundation of almshouses.<sup>59</sup> Sheila Sweetinburgh examined the place of hospitals and almshouses in spiritual gift-giving.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>55</sup> Rubin, *Charity and Community*; M. Flynn, *Sacred Charity, Confraternities and Social Welfare in Spain 1400 – 1700* (Ithaca, 1989); C. Rawcliffe, *Leprosy in Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2006); Cullum, *Cremetts and Corrodies*.

<sup>56</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*; J. A. A. Goodall, *God's House at Ewelme*, (Aldershot, 2001); Fox, 'The Royal Almshouse at Westminster'; Patricia H. Cullum, "'For Poor People Harberles': What was the Function of the Maisondieu?", in D. J. Clayton, R. G. Davies, and P. McNiven eds., *Trade, Devotion and Governance: Papers in Later Medieval History* (Stroud, 1994), pp. 36-54; Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions'. Some authors have looked at almshouses from a romantic point of view that values their contribution to the English countryside. For example: Mary F. Raphael, *The romance of English almshouses* (London, 1926).

<sup>57</sup> Clay, *Mediaeval Hospitals*, p.xix; also, J. Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People* (Oxford, 1984), p. 114.

<sup>58</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p.293

<sup>59</sup> Ibid, Derek Spruce and Steve Taylor, 'Hampshire Hospitals and Almshouses 1100 to 1640' in Nigel Goose, Helen Caffrey and Anne Langley eds., *The British Almshouse: new perspectives on philanthropy ca 1400 – 1914* (Milton Keynes, 2016), p. 77.

<sup>60</sup> Sheila Sweetinburgh, *The role of the Hospital in medieval England: Gift-giving and the spiritual economy* (Dublin, 2004) pp. 11-18.

Other scholars have suggested that an individual's mortality experience, in terms of the death of a loved one, was a causal factor in the foundation of almshouses.<sup>61</sup> It is also often assumed that almshouses were established to relieve local poverty and that they played a role in the development of increasingly centralised policies of poor relief.<sup>62</sup> However the evidence presents a conflicting picture. Some scholars question the idea that almshouses were built for the poor, suggesting instead that some residents came from more prosperous backgrounds with the almshouses representing a form of community insurance.<sup>63</sup> Others looked to outside influences that inspired the foundation of almshouses. Much is often made of Henry VII basing the ordinances of the Savoy Hospital on the ordinances of the Hospitals of S. Maria Nuova in Florence.<sup>64</sup> Were the almshouses of London influenced by other European institutions?

This thesis seeks to establish whether these theories on the origins of almshouses are supported by the evidence in the City of London and Westminster and, if not, aims to seek for the causes.

Other areas of historical interest that relate to early almshouse institutions include the development of charity and lay piety across the Reformation. Almshouses provide a unique perspective on this because the majority of new foundations after 1330 were by lay people. Lay piety and increasing levels of religious autonomy had a causal relationship with the development of almshouses, many of which were founded by lay fraternities, City companies, or individuals. Marjorie McIntosh saw the move towards founding almshouses as evidence of a weakening religious identity, as evidenced by the rise in the use of founders' names for almshouses and the decline in the building of private chapels for the use of almshouse residents.<sup>65</sup> However, Duffy wrote extensively and persuasively about the literacy and active religious agency of lay people during the

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<sup>61</sup> Henk Looijestijn, 'Funding and founding private charities: Leiden almshouses and their founders, 1450 – 1800', *Continuity and Change*, 27. 2 (2012), p. 207; Nigel Goose and Henk Looijestijn, 'Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic circa 1350-1800: a comparative perspective', *Journal of Social History* 45. 4 (2012) pp. 1049-1073.

<sup>62</sup> Horden, 'Discipline of Relevance', p. 365.

<sup>63</sup> Matthew Groom, 'Piety and Locality: Studies in Urban and Rural Religion in Surrey, c.1450-c.1550' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2001), p. 87; Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 291.

<sup>64</sup> Henderson, *Renaissance Hospital*, p. 280.

<sup>65</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief*, p. 64.



later Middle Ages, a phenomenon he suggested was not peculiar to the upper classes or the better off.<sup>66</sup> Nicole Rice suggested that the publication of theological texts for lay people during the fifteenth century led to an increase in the private use of liturgy, with the result that they sought to take on some of the activities previously reserved for the clergy, such as provision of 'spiritual works of mercy'.<sup>67</sup> Elaine Phillips suggested that the Dissolution had a profound effect on the foundation of almshouses in that it completely changed the theological foundation of the institutions from one based on intercession for the dead to the provision and ongoing maintenance of almshouses being proof of both continuing faith and grace.<sup>68</sup> These concepts are explored further in Chapter Two.

This thesis offers a different analytical perspective on charity by emphasising the central importance of not only corporal but also spiritual works of mercy. The pioneers of work on medieval charity focussed on the role of the corporal works of mercy rather than the spiritual works. Instead, I shall argue that the lay concept of charity (and that of many founders of almshouses), was based on a sophisticated theological understanding that incorporated the twin concepts of spiritual and corporal works of mercy and that almshouses were part of the embodiment of this concept. As a result of this many of the early charitable institutions, which included almshouses, were complex and multifaceted, often including education, intercession for the dead, and other pious activities.

However, a small but significant number of almshouses were simpler and not part of a larger charitable bequest. Often founded by less wealthy members of society, this group of institutions is particularly hard to trace as references to them are frequently brief or fragmentary. I argue that this group, though small, is significant in that it demonstrates concepts of piety and charity and understandings of the needs of people in poverty among those who were less wealthy or well educated than the mercantile, religious or royal elite. These small, isolated institutions also represent the beginnings of a shift in the concept of an almshouse, which starts to appear as early as the early

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<sup>66</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 68-72.

<sup>67</sup> Nicole Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature* (Cambridge, 2008), p.15.

<sup>68</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 188.

fifteenth century when some well to do parish residents began to found almshouses for the poor in isolation from other charitable works.<sup>69</sup>

Given that almshouses were founded for the relief of the poor there is clearly a lot to learn from them about attitudes to poverty.<sup>70</sup> The founders of almshouses expressed a clear desire to provide corporal and spiritual mercy to people who were poor and too debilitated to work for their living.<sup>71</sup> In 2007 Frank Rexroth published *Deviance and Power in late-medieval London*, a translation of his earlier book, *Das Milieu der Nacht: Obrigkeit und Randgruppen in Spätmittelalterlichen London*, in which he suggested that almshouses were founded to provide privacy for poor guild members because of the shame they felt about their poverty.<sup>72</sup> Rexroth theorised that companies provided almshouses for their impoverished members because they wanted to emphasise the difference between poor householders and beggars and prostitutes on the city streets. He suggested that the privacy of the almshouse gave householders a place to hide their shame. He also claimed that almshouses were used as a way to control the poor of the company with the threat of expulsion from the almshouse.<sup>73</sup> Rexroth suggested that the government of the City of London portrayed itself as an essential bastion against 'a secret, immoral counter-society [that] was operating in the city'.<sup>74</sup> He argued this concept was institutionalised in London during the fifteenth century through civic bureaucracy and internalised by the citizens of London, who used it to frame their own respectability in contrast with the indigent poor. Rexroth has been criticised for trying to make all the evidence fit this theory of repression and control of the poor.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> The first example I can find of this type of almshouse (so far) was outside London in Ilchester, Somerset. The Almshouse was founded in 1426 by a local lay landowner, Robert Veel, apparently in isolation of any other charitable works, and the foundation document made no requirement of prayer or religious attendance on the five, six or seven poor men who were the beneficiaries of this foundation. These activities may have been implicitly expected of the residents but the foundation document itself is uncharacteristically secular. The almshouse was to be governed by the local bailiffs of Ilchester and overseen by the local constable and six reputable townsfolk. William Rector Buckler ed., *Ilchester Almshouse Deeds. From the time of King John to the reign of James the First, A.D. 1200 to 1625* (Yeovil, 1866), pp. 111-116.

<sup>70</sup> The historiography of poverty is explored further in Chapter Two, pp. 40-5.

<sup>71</sup> For example: Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 109.

<sup>72</sup> Frank Rexroth, *Das Milieu der Nacht: Obrigkeit und Randgruppen in Spätmittelalterlichen London* (Göttingen, 1999).

<sup>73</sup> Frank Rexroth, *Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 255.

<sup>74</sup> Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 305.

<sup>75</sup> Paul Griffiths, 'Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London', *Journal of British Studies*, 48.1 (2009), pp. 189-91; Barbara A. Hanawalt, 'Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London', *The Catholic*

However, I will argue that the initial intention of the almshouses, while apparently attempting to confine and control the day-to-day activities of the occupants, was conversely designed to free them from poverty and to free their spirits to serve God and enable them to have control in the provision of works of mercy for the good of their souls and the souls of others. I will further argue that despite the overwhelming difference in power and wealth between almshouse founders and occupants, the conceptualisation of charity embodied by the almshouse gave its occupants a degree of control over their environment. One expression of this power is that rather than founding almshouses for single sex, single occupancy, the majority of almshouses in London and Westminster also accepted wives so that almshouse places could be taken by married couples. The ability of almspeople to influence their living environment was also helped by the administrative systems of some almshouses where the master of the almshouse was appointed from the occupants.<sup>76</sup> The freedom and self-determination that this system of administration potentially gave almspeople will also be explored.

The adaptation of almshouses to increasing levels of poverty in London during the late fifteenth and sixteenth centuries is a testament to the institution's flexibility and endurance. The value of almshouses in providing for the needs of the impotent poor was recognised by early poor law legislation which prescribed the establishment of small-scale houses for the poor in every parish.<sup>77</sup> These small houses for the poor closely resembled the small almshouses for the parish poor that had been built in many parishes before the Dissolution.<sup>78</sup> This validation by the state contributed to the evolution of the parish almshouse into the institutions we are familiar with today, but

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*Historical Review*, 95. 1 (2009), pp. 141–43; Ruth Mazo Karras, 'Deviance and Power in Late Medieval London', *Speculum*, 83. 4 (2008), pp. 1027–29.

<sup>76</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 140. Milbourne's Almshouse (Drapers'). The almsman appointed to the residence over the gate and an extra 4s a month appeared to act as warden for the establishment which after the death of John Milbourne was overseen by the Drapers' company. Thomas Milbourn, 'The Milbourne Alms-Houses, and a brief account of the founder and his family', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, (1870), pp. 144–152.

<sup>77</sup> Brian Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law: A Sketch of Canonical Theory and its Application in England* (New York, 1959), p. 131.

<sup>78</sup> See Chapter Four, p. 130.

it was not smooth or quick. Instead, I will argue that different forms of almshouses, for different social groups, existed side by side throughout this period.

The study of the built form and material culture of almshouses sheds light on contemporary understandings of the requirements for physical, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing of their occupants. I argue that almshouses were initially built as liminal spaces, a transition area between life and death that aimed to enable the poor and impotent to live out the end of their days in the fullness of their potential for life and health. I shall examine this through contemporary understanding of the basic requirements for a healthy life of the occupant including expectations of food, shelter, occupation, worship, companionship, privacy, clothing, and care during sickness and compare this to other institutions and life outside the almshouse walls.

The built form of almshouses can also tell us about the relationship between the community within and outside. I argue that the lavish provision of fireplaces and privies, combined with the secluded nature of the buildings and the insular community life prescribed by many of the founders, points to a separation from the hustle and bustle of the town. Medieval almspeople came together as a lay religious community, following a regimen of prayer and private contemplation. This separation and spiritual devotion meant that almspeople occupied a position of respect within the community. The collective nature of the community was often supported by the requirement to wear a uniform and meant that almspeople were easily identified and at the same time clearly separated from the local population.

The geographical position of almshouses also supports this view. Almshouses were usually built at the centre of the parish, close to or next to the parish church or the guildhall. In Chapter Seven I will argue that this places them both figuratively and literally at the heart of the community. Almshouses varied enormously in economic, physical and religious provision and I will argue that the local community had a clear understanding of which institutions they considered 'proper alms houses', and therefore deserved honour and respect, and which were not.

## 1.4 Almshouse Sources

I have found a total of fifty-two almshouses associated with the City of London and Westminster between 1330 and 1600. Forty-one were founded in or adjacent to the City of London, nine were in Westminster and two of unknown location (see figure 1 below). Two almshouses were founded in the fourteenth century, eighteen in the fifteenth century and thirty-two in the sixteenth century. The almshouses were founded by both women and men from a variety of different backgrounds. Some institutions were founded corporately by City companies or fraternities.<sup>79</sup> Those almshouses founded by individuals went on to be administered by a variety of organisations including City companies, religious organisations, executors, and trustees.<sup>80</sup> The almshouses founded in the City of London, in particular, were long lived; 27 per-cent still exist in some form.

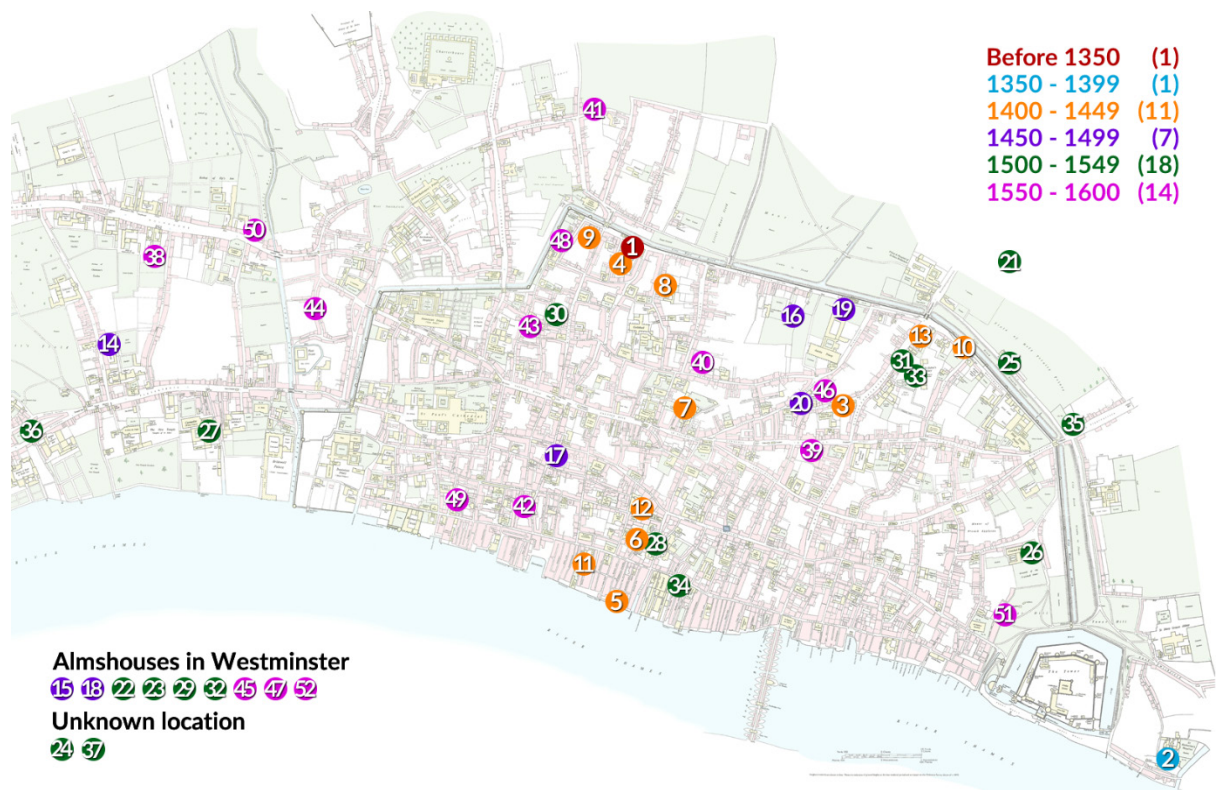
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<sup>79</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 83-85.

<sup>80</sup> See Chapter Four, pp. 119-137.

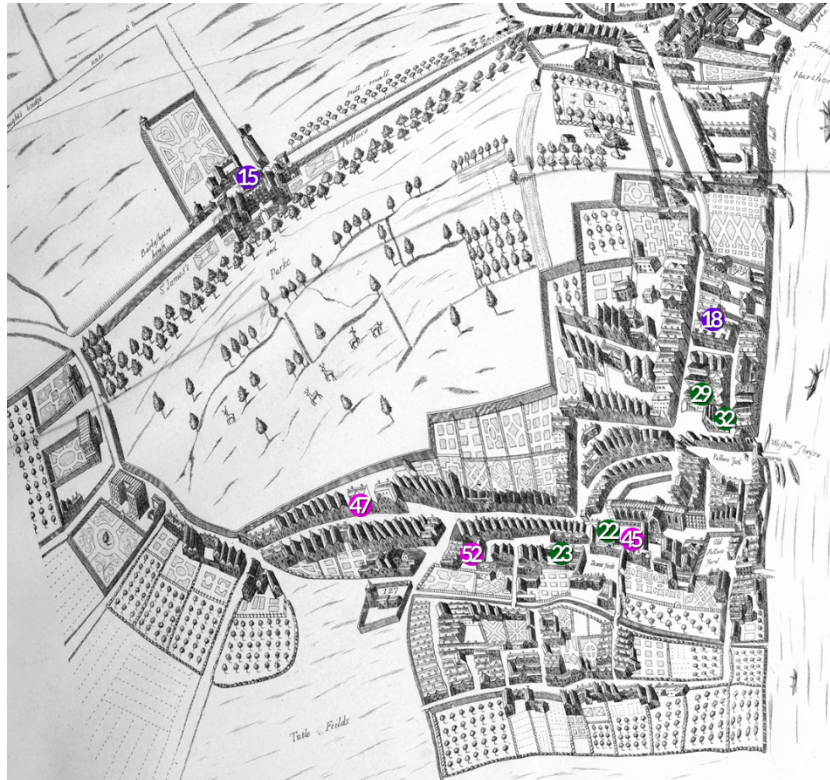
**Figure 1.1 Map of Almshouses in the City of London 1330-1600**

*A Map of Tudor London 1520, British Historic Towns Atlas*



**Figure 1.2 Map of Almshouses in Westminster 1330-1600**

*W. Faithorne and R. Newcourt Map 1658 LMA*



See index below to identify the almshouses on the maps above.

### *Index of Almshouses in the City of London and Westminster*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Elsyngspital                                   | 27. Countess of Kent's Almshouse (Clothworkers')             |
| 2. St Katharine's Hospital                        | 28. Jesus Commons  |
| 3. Merchant Taylors' Almshouse                    | 29. St Stephen's Westminster                                 |
| 4. Brewers' Almshouse                             | 30. Haberdashers' Almshouse                                  |
| 5. Whittington's Longhouse                        | 31. Andrew Judd's Almshouse (Skinners')                      |
| 6. Whittington's Almshouse                        | 32. Henry VIII's Almshouse (Watermens')                      |
| 7. Knolles' Almshouse (Grocers')                  | 33. John Hasilwood's Almshouse (Leathersellers')             |
| 8. Girdlers' Almshouse                            | 34. Robert Tyrwhitt's Almshouse (Dyers')                     |
| 9. Henry Barton's Almshouse (Skinners')           | 35. Anne Wether's Almshouse                                  |
| 10. St Augustine Papey                            | 36. St Clement Dane's Almshouse                              |
| 11. Vintners' Almshouse                           | 37. Kensington Parish Almshouse                              |
| 12. Cutlers' Almshouse                            | 38. Henry West's Almshouse (Dyers')                          |
| 13. Parish Clerks' Almshouse                      | 39. St Michael Cornhill Almshouse                            |
| 14. Domus Conversorum                             | 40. Dame Elizabeth Mory's Almshouse (Armourers')             |
| 15. St James' Westminster                         | 41. Lady Askew's Almshouse (Drapers')                        |
| 16. Carpenters' Almshouse                         | 42. Lewin's Almshouse (Ironmongers')                         |
| 17. Thomas Beaumont's Almshouse (Salters')        | 43. Sir Martin Bowes' Almshouse (Goldsmiths')                |
| 18. Guild of Our Lady of the Assumption Almshouse | 44. John Richmond's Almshouse (Armourers')                   |
| 19. Thomas Cook's Almshouse                       | 45. Westminster School Almshouse                             |
| 20. St Anthony of Vienne                          | 46. Sir Thomas Gresham's Almshouse (Mercers'/City of London) |
| 21. St Mary Spital without Bishopsgate Almshouse  | 47. Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouse                            |
| 22. Henry VII's Almshouse                         | 48. Sir Ambrose Nicholas' Almshouse (Salters')               |
| 23. Lady Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse            | 49. David Smith's Almshouse (Embroiderers')                  |
| 24. Kneseworth's Almshouse (Fishmongers')         | 50. Galliard Almshouse                                       |
| 25. Holy Trinity Almshouse                        | 51. Richard Hill's Almshouse (Merchant Taylor Hills)         |
| 26. Milbourne's Almshouse (Drapers')              | 52. Emmanuel Hospital (Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse)          |

The almshouses are mapped and catalogued in the Gazetteer in Appendix One. Some of these almshouses are small and poor and therefore the archival sources are often limited or fragmentary. Many records were lost at the Dissolution and in the Great Fire of London (1666) or in the intervening centuries and, as a result, it is impossible to create a detailed picture of many of these institutions. Therefore, rather than concentrating on one or two examples of almshouses, I have used sources from across the whole range in this study.

The sources used to identify almshouses in London and Westminster during the period 1330-1600 are diverse and varied. There is no single list or archive that details all the almshouses and indeed it is likely that there were more almshouses in the City of London and Westminster at this time than I have found. Almshouses by their very nature are also diverse and varied, some are large and wealthy and have many sources, but many people also set up small almshouses to accommodate aged servants

or poor people from the local parish that survived for a few years and then vanished. These ephemeral institutions leave little or no trace in the records. That they existed, or are likely to have existed is demonstrated by the almshouses I have found that are evidenced by a single line of text in a will, *Certificates of Colleges and Chantries*, or in John Stow's *Survey of London*.<sup>81</sup>

These sources can be divided into several categories: records created by or for almshouses or their founders, references in other primary sources, references in intermediate historical sources, and archaeological evidence. The archaeological evidence relates to just one almshouse in London, St Mary Spital outside Bishopsgate, while the other groups contain many different types of sources.

The records created by or for almshouses and their founders include foundation charters, ordinances, indentures, and wills. The foundation charters of almshouses are rare documents; there are only three surviving examples: Elsyngspital, St Katharine's Hospital and Domus Conversorum. These are older almshouses that were part of a larger foundation that often included a college of priests, an educational establishment, and a hospital. All three foundation charters, which were written in Latin, are carefully preserved. These documents are instruments of incorporation from the Crown which confer an independent legal personality on an organisation. They also speak of the founder's vision for the institution and their ideas about day-to-day management and administration. Elsyngspital and St Katharine's Hospital have several foundation charters that demonstrate their development. Both hospitals were held accountable to a higher authority – St Paul's Cathedral for Elsyngspital and the Queen of England for St Katharine's Hospital. Their function was to make sure that the institution was run along the lines set out in the foundation charter. However, foundation charters do not take account of changes, additions or subtractions or habitual practices that developed over the hundreds of years since they were first issued. Therefore, charters may only partially reflect the day-to-day reality of life in a late medieval or Tudor almshouse.

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<sup>81</sup> Stow, *Survey*, pp. 124, 261.



Only three of the fifty almshouses in the study have surviving ordinances.<sup>82</sup> An ordinance can be defined as an authoritative decree or command, often with overtones of religious significance: ordinances do not always have legal status.<sup>83</sup> The three surviving ordinances span the timeframe of this study. Whittington's Almshouse ordinances date from 1424 and were written in Latin and English, the English version to be held at the almshouse for the use of the almspeople. The ordinances state that:

alle and every Chapter and Satute of the same ordinance be redde openly and clerely expounded every quarter of ye yere onys at the leest by fore the Tutor and porefolk of the hous ...<sup>84</sup>

The frequent reading of the ordinances of the almshouses can only have served to emphasise the rules and regulations in the minds of the almshouse administrators and residents and so it is more probable that the practice of these almshouses more closely resembled the theory embodied by the rules.

The indentures of two almshouses also survive. An Indenture is a binding covenant or contract between two parties; the word is also used to characterise a contract by which an apprentice is bound to a master.<sup>85</sup> The two almshouses with surviving indentures are Henry VII's Almshouse in Westminster (1502) and the Countess of Kent's Almshouse, which was transferred to the Clothworkers' Company by an Indenture in 1537; both these documents are written in English.<sup>86</sup> The almsmen of Henry VII's Almshouse swore an oath to keep the elaborate rules described in the two indentures relating to the almshouse.<sup>87</sup> The indenture relating to the Countess of Kent's Almshouse was with the Wardens of the Clothworkers' Company, who were covenanted to maintain the almshouse as described in the deed. Both sets of indentures required the removal from the almshouse of residents who did not keep to

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<sup>82</sup> Whittington's Almshouse 1424, David Smith's Almshouse 1587, Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse (Emmanuel Hospital) 1595.

<sup>83</sup> *OED*

<sup>84</sup> Whittington Almshouse Ordinances: Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 120.

<sup>85</sup> *OED*

<sup>86</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498. CCA, CL/G/MSS/Angell/5/21/23.

<sup>87</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 42v.

the rules, a strategy aimed at maintaining the administration and rule of the almshouse as the founder intended.<sup>88</sup>

Wills provide one of the most extensive sources for almshouse foundation. Twenty-two wills have been found that mention founding an almshouse. Some of these give directions for the future administration and management of the establishment. Wills are potentially unreliable documents in that they do not provide evidence that the bequests detailed in the will were carried out. Clive Burgess has convincingly argued that the use of wills to estimate an individual's wealth is highly problematic, since it was also common to make verbal arrangements for bequests which are not recorded in wills.<sup>89</sup> Twenty-one of the wills are accompanied by additional evidence in the form of company records and other sources detailed below. However, despite searching through many wills I have only found one that recorded the foundation of an almshouse without any additional supporting evidence. Sir Thomas Cook's will, proved in 1478, recorded a small private almshouse that it appears was already established and asked that two of his household servants be given a place in it.<sup>90</sup> As will be discussed later, almshouses were usually established during the founder's lifetime.<sup>91</sup> The almshouses that survived in the record were usually protected by other legal means such as ordinances and indentures. It would appear that writing a will was not enough to ensure the testators' wishes would be carried out after death. Thomas Cook's Almshouse existed at the time of the founder's death, but there is no evidence to show how long it was maintained after it.

There are also other primary sources that document the existence of almshouses. Six almshouses are mentioned in the London and Middlesex Chantry Certificates (1548), of which two, St Clement Dane and Kensington, are unsupported by additional sources. The Chantry Certificates were issued by Royal Commissioners in 1548 in preparation for the enactment of the Chantries Act, and the aim was to make a written record of lands, revenues and goods of hospitals, colleges, free chapels, fraternities,

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<sup>88</sup> CCA, CL/G/MSS/Angell/5/21/23.

<sup>89</sup> Clive Burgess, 'Late Medieval Wills and Pious Convention: Testamentary Evidence Reconsidered', in M. A. Hicks ed., *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England* (Gloucester, 1990), pp. 14–33.

<sup>90</sup> TNA, PROB 11/6/467 (36 Wattys). My thanks to Dr Jane Williams for bringing this document to my attention.

<sup>91</sup> See Chapter Three, p. 82.

brotherhoods, guilds and chantries.<sup>92</sup> Therefore we can be confident that the almshouse establishments recorded in the certificates existed in 1548, though when they were founded remains a mystery.

The existence of Whittington's Longhouse is supported by a single entry in the Vintry Wardmote inquest minutes and presentments 1687-1774. However, this entry, which records rents for the property, which was rebuilt after the Great Fire of London, as provided in evidence to the Wardmote, is reliable.<sup>93</sup> The Brewers' Almshouse also relies on one source but this is extensive and detailed. The Minute Book of William Porlond, an account and memoranda book written in Latin, provides extensive details about the almshouse fabric and residents.<sup>94</sup>

Other primary sources for almshouses include: company records, accounts, wardens' accounts, rental books, registers, cartularies, Calendars of Close Rolls and Ralph Treswell's plans. These records are usually in Latin or English and provide supporting evidence for the existence of almshouses. *A Book of London English 1384-1425* edited by Chambers and Daunt, also contains extracts from manuscripts that record the presence of almshouses in the City of London in the late medieval period.<sup>95</sup>

There are other primary sources, such as John Stow's *Survey of London* and the Charity Commissioners' reports, which have particular issues that need to be recognised. *The Survey of London* by John Stow, first published in 1598, provides a key source for the presence of almshouses in London at the end of the sixteenth century, but it is a complex source.<sup>96</sup> Stow's survey recorded the buildings and memorials he found of interest in his comprehensive tour of the streets of London. This means that we can be reasonably sure that if he documented the presence of an almshouse then it did exist. Stow's value judgements about the almshouses, the almshouses he considers 'proper' or 'well built', are interesting, as are his comments about badly run establishments,

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<sup>92</sup> C. J. Kitching ed., *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, London Record Society 16 (1980).

<sup>93</sup> GA, Vintry Ward, *Wardmote Inquest Minutes and Presentments*, 1687-1774, GA, Viewers Reports, Vol II, p. 89.

<sup>94</sup> GA CLC/L/BF/A/021/MS05440. William Porlond's Minute Book, (1418-1440); Caroline Metcalfe, 'William Porlond clerk to the Craft and Fraternity of the Brewers of London', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 64 (2013), p. 267-284.

<sup>95</sup> R. W. Chambers and M. Daunt, eds., *A Book of London English 1384-1425* (Oxford, 1931).

<sup>96</sup> Stow, *Survey*.

but his reports of the history of the almshouses are less reliable. Patrick Collinson writes persuasively about Stow's cultural nostalgia, and his tendency to venerate old catholic values at the expense of the new protestant reality.<sup>97</sup> This is not a problem for the majority of the almshouses mentioned in the *Survey of London*; of the seventeen almshouses mentioned fifteen are supported by additional sources. There are two almshouses mentioned by Stow for which I can find no other records - Holy Trinity and Galliard. It is highly probable these almshouses existed, but that all other records of them appear to have been lost.

Another important source is the Charity Commissioners' report of 1829 on the *Endowed Charities of the City of London*. The Charity Commissioners' report was based on evidence taken by the commission from City Companies and other interested parties. The report is thorough, but not infallible. The 1829 Charity Commissioners overlooked the evidence of the existence of Henry Barton's Almshouse, for instance.<sup>98</sup> However, it is reasonable to assume that the almshouses did exist if they were included in the report. This is the only source I have found for two almshouses: Dame Elizabeth Mory's Almshouse and John Richmond's Almshouse (Armourers').

A similar fate seems to have befallen the medieval and Tudor records of the Watermen and Lightermen's Company. The only record I can find relating to their Tudor almshouse is the account recorded in the History of the Watermen and Lightermen published in 1887. The almshouse still exists, now outside London, but its early history is difficult to trace.<sup>99</sup>

## 1.5 Research Questions

The aim of this thesis is to research the almshouses of London between 1330 and 1600 in order to answer four key questions: Firstly: what was the importance of Londoners' experience of wealth, piety, and mortality in relation to the scale and pattern of almshouse foundation and support? Secondly: how did almshouses function as an

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<sup>97</sup> Patrick Collinson, 'John Stow and Nostalgic Antiquarianism', in Julia Merritt ed., *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype 1598-1720* (Cambridge, 2001), p. 37.

<sup>98</sup> *Endowed Charities*, p. 438.

<sup>99</sup> Henry Humpherus, *A Comprehensive History of the Company of Watermen and Lightermen, 1514 to 1920* (London, 1887).

institution in London and in the late-medieval and Tudor context of spiritual and physical health? Thirdly: what was the social and charitable function of the almshouse for founders, residents and within the wider urban area? And finally, how did the development of almshouses in the City of London and Westminster compare to provision for similar populations in the rest of England and Europe?

This is a thesis of two halves. The first half, chapters two, three, and four, examines the concepts that underlie the origins and development of almshouses. Therefore, Chapter Two (literature review) discusses the concepts of poverty and charity, particularly from the lay perspective, and the influences relating to these concepts, including the changing understanding of the nature of poverty, and how the experience of poverty differed between rural and urban areas across the period. This is followed by an analysis of the different factors that influenced lay people's understanding of the concept of charity, including theology, philosophy, the preaching of the friars, literature, stories, and song. The chapter concludes with a comparison of the variety of responses to these two issues from the Church, the state and lay people.

Chapter Three investigates the variety of almshouse provision in the City of London and Westminster between 1330 and 1600, groups them into categories and analyses the different factors that influenced their foundation, including mortality experience, piety, and politics. Almshouses were often just one part of the founder's charitable activity, and this chapter seeks to place them in their proper context in relation to the founder's original charitable vision.

Almshouse founders were responsible for the birth of these institutions, but the people who took over their management after the founders' deaths determined their future character and survival. Chapter Four investigates the ongoing administration of almshouses and seeks to ascertain the factors that supported their long-term survival. It also examines the almshouses of the City of London and Westminster in context by comparing them to similar institutions in other parts of England and Europe.

The second half of the thesis looks at the practical consequences of these concepts. Chapter Five will analyse the almshouses of London and Westminster in terms of their capacity to promote physical and spiritual health in the way these concepts were

understood by contemporaries. To do this I will first look at contemporary medical understandings of bodily health (humoral theory) and at spiritual health and sickness, then analyse the environment of almshouses as compared to hospitals to determine how they managed the non-naturals and the provision of medical practitioners.

Chapter Six examines the relationship between almshouses and pilgrimage. Pilgrimage to local, smaller shrines became less popular during the late-medieval period as local authorities tried to prevent the movement of the indigent poor, and was finally stopped by the Dissolution in the sixteenth century. I will propose that almshouses served as a vehicle that enabled ordinary people who had suffered from hardship, disease, or impotence, to subvert the contemporary curtailment of the spiritual discipline of pilgrimage. Almshouses became places where almspeople were empowered to take their own moral and spiritual internal pilgrimage and to live out the ends of their lives in charity and dignity.

In Chapter Seven the focus widens to investigate the role and impact of almshouses in the local community, including the geographical context in terms of the social and economic profile of the areas where almshouses were founded and their position within the parish Church precinct. I will argue that almshouses played a complex and paradoxical role in the landscape of the city, being both public and private, proud, and modest, visible, and secluded, almshouses also played a central role in the civic ceremony of the city. The differences between the relationship of traditional medieval hospitals and almshouses with the local community will be examined and I will argue that, unlike the medieval hospitals that were largely self-contained, almshouses and almspeople were embedded in the heart of the community and had an active role to play. Almspeople also maintained an active relationship with the community of the dead. Often sited in or next to graveyards, almshouses were liminal spaces where life and death overlapped.

Medieval and Tudor almshouses are a fascinating and rewarding area of study, illuminating contemporary understanding of charity, piety and attitudes to poverty, health, and wellbeing. In the next chapter I will examine the concepts of poverty and

charity, the various ways that these were expressed in contemporary culture and how these relate to the foundation of almshouses.

## Chapter Two: The Social, Theological, and Cultural Influences on the Development of Almshouses

‘Blessed is he that considereth the poor:  
the Lord will deliver him in time of trouble’<sup>1</sup>

The concepts of charity and poverty are of cardinal importance to the foundation of almshouses during the late-Middle Ages. The founding ordinances of Richard Whittington’s almshouses (1424) state:

The fervent desire and besy intension of a prudent wise and devoute man shold be to cast before & make secure the state and the ende of his short lyff with dedes of mercy and pite And namely to provide for suche pouer persones whiche grievous penurie and cruelle fortune have oppressed and be not of power to gete their lyvyng either by craft or by eny other bodily labour Wherby that at ye day of the last Jugement he may take his part with hem that shalle be saved.<sup>2</sup>

In this short passage, composed by his executors,<sup>3</sup> Whittington’s motivation for founding the almshouse is made plain. It states that it is prudent and wise to perform acts of mercy and pity - i.e. charity - specifically for poor people who have suffered misfortune, in order to be saved at the last judgement. Whittington’s motivation was that of a prudent businessman making a strategic investment to ensure his long-term post-mortem well-being.<sup>4</sup> The act of mercy (charity) embodied by the foundation of an almshouse was portrayed as a method of guaranteeing Whittington’s eternal salvation.

Concepts of poverty and charity are fundamental to the understanding of this dedication and many others like it. Understanding the importance of these concepts to the people of late-medieval London can help us to begin to unpack the influences that led to the foundation of almshouses and to understand the social, religious, economic

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<sup>1</sup> Psalm 41.1.

<sup>2</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 109.

<sup>3</sup> The foundation ordinances of Whittington’s Almshouses were written after his death but the preamble states that Whittington commissioned his executors to establish the almshouse on his deathbed and it appears that it was founded according to his instructions: Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 10. See Appendix One, p. 321.

<sup>4</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, ‘Dives Redeemed? The Guild Almshouses of Later Medieval England’, in Linda Clark ed., *Rule, Redemption and Representations in Late Medieval England and France* (Woodbridge, 2008), pp. 4-5.



and intellectual factors that influenced the experience of poverty and the expression of charity and how these changed over time.

## 2.1 Poverty

In order to understand the impact of poverty and the role of charity in the period 1330 to 1600 we need to consider what was meant by the term poverty and who was included in the term 'pouer persones' and so considered deserving of mercy and charity.<sup>5</sup> The way we think about medieval poverty and the poor has changed over time. The first modern commentators on medieval and early-modern poverty, E.M. Leonard and Sidney and Beatrice Webb, focussed on the development of legislation and its implementation.<sup>6</sup> Professor Jordan, writing in 1960 described people in poverty in the late-Middle Ages as 'social and economic derelicts, whom the city of London found itself obliged to support.'<sup>7</sup> The term derelict, meaning without home or property, has overtones of censure; it can also be defined as negligent and therefore implies that the poor were to some extent the architects of their own misery. More recently Christopher Dyer defined poverty in the Middle Ages as 'life-threatening deprivation', which has the virtue of brevity, but to our twenty-first century eyes brings visions of naked starving people.<sup>8</sup> This definition may be valid to a limited extent, but other recent commentators are more inclusive in their definitions of late-medieval poverty. Caroline Barron's practical approach to this problem is to define those in poverty as 'destitute and dependent upon the charity of others' and also living on wages that were below the taxation limit.<sup>9</sup> Marjorie McIntosh represents a large group of scholars who attempted to tackle the problem in a manner redolent of medieval contemporaries by dividing the poor into groups based on the factors that caused their poverty. These included the 'deserving or impotent poor [who] were unable, through no fault of their own, to engage in the labour necessary to support their own'; 'people who wanted to work but could not find sufficient employment';

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<sup>5</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 10; see Appendix One, p. 321.

<sup>6</sup> E.M. Leonard, *The Early History of English Poor Relief* (Cambridge, 1900) and S. and B. Webb, *English Poor Law History Part 1: The Old Poor Law* (London, 1927).

<sup>7</sup> Jordan, *Charities*, p. 86.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher Dyer, *Standards of living in the later Middle Ages; social change in England c1200 – 1520* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 234.

<sup>9</sup> Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 274.

and the 'unworthy' poor; the able-bodied who were unwilling to work;<sup>10</sup> Paul Slack also suggested that poverty was a relative concept subject to the mobility of social expectations and economic conditions, and that degrees of poverty were also relative with some forms of poverty being temporary or 'shallow', such as the poverty caused by a bad harvest or an epidemic, and others deep and persistent.<sup>11</sup>

Medieval clerical writers faced similar problems when attempting to define poverty. In the twelfth century the canonist Huguccio divided the poor into three categories. The first were born poor but endured their poverty joyfully for the love of God. The second category voluntarily became poor, giving up everything to follow Christ. The third category included those in involuntary poverty, those trapped by life events, who lived miserable lives. The point Huguccio was making was that some people find spiritual enrichment from poverty, but that for many the experience could be painful and unpleasant and a situation that might increase the temptation to sin.<sup>12</sup> After the Black Death there began to be concerns about able-bodied people travelling the country and begging. The Church considered its response to this situation and in the mid fifteenth century Joannes de Turrecremata wrote that a man who could work with his hands should not be numbered among the poor but rebuked as a defrauder of the poor.<sup>13</sup> Around the same time William Lyndwood, an English jurist, took a different approach to the able-bodied poor. He was considering the definition of poverty in the context of who should qualify for legal assistance: the poor were allowed to present cases in the church courts with no charge. He debated how best to define this group, proposing initially that anyone who laboured for a living should be considered in poverty, but he finally decided to settle on the objective measure of a person's wealth, and he defined poverty as anyone who had property that was worth less than fifty gold pieces (or approximately £75).<sup>14</sup> This seems very generous: the minimum income regarded as necessary to support a gentleman in the fifteenth century was at least £20 per year

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<sup>10</sup> Marjorie McIntosh, 'Local responses to the poor in late medieval and Tudor England', *Continuity and Change* 3 2, 1988, pp. 210-211.

<sup>11</sup> Paul Slack, *Poverty and Policy in Tudor and Stuart England* (London and New York, 1988), pp. 2, 39.

<sup>12</sup> Joannes de Turrecremata, *Repertorium Joannis de Turrecremata super Toto Decreto*, 86 1 (Lyons, 1519), fols. 253r-260r.

<sup>13</sup> Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, p. 118.

<sup>14</sup> William Lyndwood, *Provinciale (seu Constitutiones Angliae)... annotationibus Johannis de Athona* (Oxford, 1679), p. 68.

whereas, a labourer might earn in the region of £3 5s. 0d. for 218 days' work.<sup>15</sup>

William Lyndwood appears to have included many minor members of the aristocracy in the category of the poor requiring legal assistance. Setting the standard of poverty so high is quite surprising after encountering all the modern definitions that refer to extreme distress and destitution, but it seems that William Lyndwood was aware that anyone could experience periods of poverty, property owners included, and he demonstrated a sophisticated understanding of the complexity of poverty in the world in which he lived. Marjorie McIntosh described this as 'life-cycle problems', which could affect people at certain ages or stages such as being orphaned as a child, or being injured or becoming chronically ill, or being subject to 'accidental need' through shipwreck, fire or robbery.<sup>16</sup>

The reality of life in medieval England was that poverty haunted many people, not just the poor. Age, accident, and sickness could deprive an individual of the ability to earn or grow their daily bread and death could strike indiscriminately leaving families without the means to support themselves, whether they owned a small property or not. The situation varied widely between urban and rural communities. In rural communities a degree of poverty was commonplace with peasants often living at a subsistence level with periods of bad weather, disease among livestock and kin, liable to push a family into difficulties. Poverty in towns, however, was much more visible and often deeper. Towns were a magnet for the young and poor seeking employment or alms. Before 1347 there were hundreds, possibly thousands of people living in poverty in London, and underemployment was a common cause of poverty across the country.<sup>17</sup>

After the advent of the Black Death the situation changed drastically. The enormous mortality and continuing epidemics had the unanticipated benefit of freeing many from poverty in rural and urban areas alike. The resulting chronic labour shortage meant that the real wages of unskilled workers rose substantially, and when the grain

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<sup>15</sup> Dyer, *Standards of living in the later Middle Ages*, pp. 31, 257.

<sup>16</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, p. 5. Also see Erik Spindler, 'Marginality and Social Relations in London and the Bruges Area, 1370-1440' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 2008), pp. 13-16.

<sup>17</sup> Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 275.

prices began to fall after 1375 labourers became much better off.<sup>18</sup> Some people profited from this, taking over abandoned land, others responded to the labour shortage by moving around the country in order to find better wages. This movement of people and the increased earning potential of peasants worried land-owners and clergy alike. The poem *Piers Plowman* demonstrated the undercurrent of anxiety at this time, portraying greedy peasants who liked to drink their earnings in the ale house rather than diligently working every day.<sup>19</sup> Following the fall of France in the mid-fifteenth century, returning soldiers temporarily swelled the ranks of people moving from place to place and added to the anxieties of the local populace. These people wandered as vagrants, often operating on the fringes of society and inspiring fear of robbery, challenging traditional attitudes to poverty and attracting censure.

The problems associated with the poor following the early episodes of plague centred around the facts that the poor were much better off, that it cost more to employ people and it was hard to find servants.<sup>20</sup> By the mid-fifteenth century the situation was changing. In rural areas agricultural conditions worsened with changing weather patterns causing great variability in crop yields. The harvests of the 1470s and 1480s were particularly poor and the associated rise in grain prices caused much hardship in rural and urban areas alike.<sup>21</sup> To make matters worse there were also several severe outbreaks of plague and sickness during the late fifteenth century in London and Westminster.<sup>22</sup> The experience of poverty across both rural and urban areas was varied at this time. Further moves towards the enclosure of land brought poverty to some peasants, whose subsistence living was compromised by the removal of access to previously common ground, whereas the expansion of trade presented opportunities to others.<sup>23</sup> These changes also brought about increasing pressure on the family unit; it became less able to weather periodic dips in fortune due to illness or

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<sup>18</sup> John Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', *Past & Present*, 144 (August 1994), p. 30; Jim Bolton, "'The World Upside Down': Plague as an Agent of Economic and Social Change', in Mark Ormrod and Phillip Lindley eds., *The Black Death in England* (Stamford, 1996), pp. 34-36.

<sup>19</sup> William Langland, *Piers Plowman: A new translation of the B-text*, trans. A.V.C. Schmidt (Oxford, 1992), p. 73.

<sup>20</sup> Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 18.

<sup>21</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, p. 17.

<sup>22</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 370-371.

<sup>23</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, p. 18.

food shortages and less able to support other members of the extended family who experienced similar problems.

In urban areas, in the fifteenth century, the poor comprised a fluid and amorphous body of people, including pilgrims, orphans, travellers, vagrants, widows, the elderly, disabled and people searching for work. Their numbers were initially low and stable, the ever present flow of people moving into the city to seek alms or their fortune more than balanced by the high death rate from disease and want.<sup>24</sup> During the fifteenth century internal migration to urban areas increased and, as a result of the rising numbers of poor people in towns, there was increasing pressure on the Church and other sources of charity within the parish.<sup>25</sup> By the late fifteenth century the population was slowly beginning to recover its numbers and this added to those in poverty, as work became harder to find. Then, between 1530 and 1565 the Dissolution removed many of the traditional sources of charity for the impoverished. By the end of the sixteenth century, in town, country, and in the City of London, parishes struggled to cope with the level of need.<sup>26</sup>

There are some disagreements among scholars about the general economic fortunes of London in the fifteenth century. Keene and Harding's study of Cheapside before the Great Fire found that there was a stagnation in property prices during this period following a collapse in property prices during the 1420s which continued for the rest of the century. However, during the late fifteenth century London experienced a trade boom in the sale of cloth.<sup>27</sup> By the beginning of the sixteenth century poverty was beginning to become more of a problem. Vanessa Harding documented the problems inherent in trying to estimate population levels in the City of London during the early-modern period, but it is still clear that the population was growing rapidly.<sup>28</sup> The provision of space in towns became more cramped. Large towns, like London, had already built upwards and multi-occupancy dwellings became more common. Even so,

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<sup>24</sup> Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 275.

<sup>25</sup> McIntosh, 'Local responses to the poor', p. 217.

<sup>26</sup> McIntosh, 'Local responses to the poor', p. 225.

<sup>27</sup> Vanessa Harding, 'Houses and Households in Cheapside c.1500-1550', in Matthew P. Davies, James A. Galloway eds., *London and beyond: Essays in Honour of Derek Keene* (London, 2012), pp. 137, 139.

<sup>28</sup> Vanessa Harding, 'The Population of London, 1550-1700: a review of the published evidence', *The London Journal*, 15:2 (1990), pp. 111-12.

most people lived within a quarter of a mile of open ground.<sup>29</sup> Society became increasingly stratified with a few excessively wealthy people and a multitude of the poor at various stages of poverty.

Steve Rappaport concluded that during the Tudor period three-fifths of the wealth in towns was held by one-tenth of the population. Furthermore, he found that approximately 10 per cent of the population of London were in destitution, with another 15 per cent living at subsistence level, without the resources to weather dips in fortune.<sup>30</sup> Many people came to London as young economic migrants seeking apprenticeships and work in service; many migrants were destitute before they arrived and stayed that way.<sup>31</sup>

London attracted many migrants partly due to its prosperity and higher wages and partly due to the high density of organisations and individuals providing charity to the needy. This brings us back to Richard Whittington's Almshouse ordinances which specify the type of 'pouer persones' he felt were suitable to receive his charity. The people he chose to help with his charity were those:

'whiche grievous penurie and cruelle fortune have oppressed and be not of power to gete their lyvyng either by craft or by eny other bodily labour.'<sup>32</sup>

The term 'grievous penurie' refers to a state of extreme poverty, whereas the phrase 'cruelle fortune' implies people who have had a hard time through no fault of their own. These were the worthy poor, those who were in poverty and not able to support themselves by their chosen profession, or by bodily labour. The question then is why did Richard Whittington, and other almshouse founders, choose to support the worthy impotent poor? What factors influenced their decision and why did they want to provide charity at all?

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<sup>29</sup> Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, p. 189.

<sup>30</sup> Steve Rappaport, *Worlds within worlds: structures of life in sixteenth-century London* (Cambridge, 1989), p. 170.

<sup>31</sup> Vanessa Harding, 'Families in later medieval London: sex, marriage and mortality', in Elizabeth A. New and Christian Steer eds., *Medieval Londoners: essays to mark the eightieth birthday of Caroline M. Barron* (London, 2019), p. 30. Susan Brigden, 'Religion and Social Obligation in Early Sixteenth-Century London', *Past & Present*, 103 (1984), pp. 67-112.

<sup>32</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 109.

## 2.2 Charity

The early English study of medieval charity was characterised by the assumption that the Protestant paternalistic attitudes of the social reformers of the nineteenth and twentieth century were shared by the Catholic medieval founders of charitable institutions. W.K. Jordan demonstrated this attitude in his various epic works on the charitable activities of both urban and rural people in England by using the language of nineteenth-century charity, particularly the concept of 'philanthropy', as in the benevolent donation of money to good causes, to characterise the charitable activities of the Middle Ages.<sup>33</sup> The term 'philanthropy' as used by Jordan has overtones of fatherly benevolence, based on a Protestant ideology which includes aspects of charity in terms of benevolence or love, but focusses on solving social problems by tackling the root cause. This ideology viewed charity as one way, from benefactor to benefited, whereas the medieval concepts of charity were far more transactional with the recipient of charity benefiting the giver with the valuable prayers of the poor (seen as closer to God), the acquisition of good standing with God and, importantly, a remission of time spent in purgatory.

The second half of the twentieth century saw the development of ideas influenced by the field of social anthropology, which explained the phenomenon of medieval charity in terms of the historical development of social behaviour and psychology. These ideas, inspired by the work of Marcel Mauss, depicted medieval charity as an extension of the ancient cultural practice of gift-giving, where the giving of a gift of alms reinforced the higher social status of the giver as benefactor and the lower social status of the receiver as servant, who then had an obligation to the giver.<sup>34</sup> From this vantage point gift-giving, or charity, can be seen as a vehicle that promotes social cohesion and stability, provoking loyalty and feelings of obligation in the gift receiver and bolstering the superior social position of the giver.

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<sup>33</sup> Jordan, *Charities*; W.K. Jordan, *Philanthropy in England 1480 – 1660: A Study of the Changing Pattern of English Social Aspirations* (London, 1959); W.K. Jordan, *The Charities of Rural England: The Aspirations and Achievements of the Rural Society* (London, 1961).

<sup>34</sup> M. Mauss, *The gift: forms and functions of exchange in archaic societies*, trans. Ian Cunnison, (London, 1966), pp. 17-18.

More recently the historiography of medieval charity has become more complex. The influence of social anthropology remains in the desire to look at medieval society holistically, considering the religious, environmental, social, psychological, and cultural influences that might motivate medieval people to be charitable. Miri Rubin was at the forefront of this new direction. She acknowledged the influence of religion, the desire for salvation and fear of purgatory in charitable giving and the reinforcement of social hierarchy inherent in the giving and acceptance of a gift. Sheila Sweetinburgh also emphasised the need to understand the recipient of charity as well as the giver, developing the idea that medieval charity could be a form of insurance.<sup>35</sup> This frames charity as a reciprocal mechanism of self-help which enabled people of limited means to band together to provide for some security in an age of turmoil, as well as a method for the giver to be succoured in purgatory and go to heaven at the last judgement.

The thrust of scholarship has been to refine and enrich this approach. Virginia Bainbridge emphasised the role of charity in reinforcing both the lateral and hierarchical bonds within a community, highlighting the contained nature of charity within communities in the medieval countryside.<sup>36</sup> Other threads of research have increased the focus on the religious and intellectual foundation of medieval charitable practices. To trace the evolution of theology, culture and influence that produced a climate that facilitated the creation of charitable institutions, Maureen Flynn emphasised the role of religion in the provision of charity. She defined medieval charity as a religious rite and demonstrated how theological ideas were absorbed into the culture and psychology of medieval Spain, an approach that has recently been expanded by James Brodman, who views religion as the crucible that produced the medieval charitable impulse.<sup>37</sup>

The obligation of providing charity was a recurrent theme in the writings of the early fathers of the Christian Church. In the fifth century Augustine of Hippo wrote that almsgiving and charity were an effective atonement for sin that would please God, and

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<sup>35</sup> Sweetinburgh, *The role of the Hospital in medieval England*, pp. 11-18. Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 289.

<sup>36</sup> Virginia Bainbridge, *Guilds in the Medieval Countryside* (Woodbridge, 1996), pp. 99-122.

<sup>37</sup> M. Flynn, *Sacred Charity, Confraternities and Social Welfare in Spain 1400 – 1700* (Ithaca, 1989), pp. 42, 141-145; and J. W. Brodman, *Charity and Religion in Medieval Europe* (Washington DC, 2009).



he created an expanded list of the behaviours that constituted charity, based on worthy activity recorded in both the Old and New Testaments.<sup>38</sup> In the thirteenth century this list was divided into two. The seven corporal works of mercy consisted of: feeding the hungry, giving drink to the thirsty, clothing the naked, visiting the sick, visiting the imprisoned, sheltering the homeless and burying the dead. The seven spiritual works of mercy were: instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, admonishing sinners, bearing wrongs patiently, forgiving offences willingly, comforting the afflicted and praying for the living and the dead. Alfonso X of Castile's law code, the *Siete Partidas* considers the spiritual works of mercy superior to the corporal works.<sup>39</sup>

Thomas Aquinas, Dominican friar, priest and theologian to Pope Clement VI, had far-reaching influence on both the teaching and understanding of theology from the thirteenth century onwards. In the *Summa Theologica* (written between 1265 and 1284) Aquinas built on the work of Augustine and Pope Innocent III (r.1198-1216) on the concept and role of charity in Christian life. He endorsed the seven spiritual works of mercy and the seven corporal works of mercy, and developed the concept of charity, by linking love of God with love of neighbour; therefore expressing love for a neighbour in a work of charity was demonstrating love for God. He wrote:

Now the aspect under which our neighbour is to be loved, is God, since what we ought to love in our neighbour is that he may be in God. Hence it is clear that it is specifically the same act whereby we love God, and whereby we love our neighbour. Consequently, the habit of charity extends not only to the love of God, but also to the love of our neighbour.<sup>40</sup>

The development of the idea of practising love of God through charitable works to a neighbour was demonstrated by the founding of both religious and lay orders devoted to acts of mercy, such as the Hospitallers, the Dominicans and the Beguines. These orders adopted a new Augustinian rule of life which was more flexible than the Benedictine rule and therefore facilitated active work in the community. There

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<sup>38</sup> Augustine, *Enchiridion*, trans. and ed. A. C. Outler, (Texas, 1955), pp. 67-9.

<sup>39</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, p. 26.

<sup>40</sup> Thomas Aquinas, 'Treatise on The Theological Virtues', *Summa Theologica*, trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province (New York, 1947), Q. 24.

remained a tension within this development, with traditional religious orders such as the Benedictines emphasising the value of the contemplative life, the *vita passiva*, over the active life, the *vita activa*. The contemplative life of withdrawal from the marketplace, chastity and study remained an ideal, but as the Middle Ages progressed the *vita activa*, a religious life of service and charity, became more popular both inside and outside the cloister. By the thirteenth century there was broad agreement that both *vita activa* and *vita passiva* were legitimate ways to serve God. However, the *vita activa* was more attainable for ordinary people in terms of acts of service and almsgiving.<sup>41</sup>

Charity as an expression of both God's love for people and an individual's love for God can be described as a 'pull factor' attracting pious individuals towards acts of charity. Other aspects of both theological and of cultural significance can be thought of as 'push factors' driving people towards acts of charity. The 'push factors' including sin, death and the concept of purgatory, were real, visible and ever present, haunting people throughout their lives and shadowing their passage into death.

Death was a pervasive, imminent presence to the people of late-medieval London. The arrival of the Black Death in Britain in 1348 profoundly shocked the population and this was followed throughout the following 300 years by a succession of repeat outbreaks and other epidemics.<sup>42</sup> The people of London suffered from more outbreaks of plague than the rest of England with an outbreak, on average, every three and a half years between 1348 and 1530.<sup>43</sup> Many things were blamed for the Black Death from the malign influence of foreigners, to bad odours, but the wrath of God against the sins of man was a recurrent theme.<sup>44</sup> The Black Death struck quickly and threatened everyone. Even priests were susceptible to it, and so many of them died during the first outbreak in 1348 that there was no guarantee the dying could find one in time to hear the last rites.<sup>45</sup> The last rites included an act of confession, contrition and forgiveness, which was performed by a priest while a person remained lucid just

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<sup>41</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, pp. 272-284.

<sup>42</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 362-374.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, p. 68.

<sup>44</sup> R. Horrox ed., *The Black Death* (Manchester, 1994), Part II.

<sup>45</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, p. 273, on the shortage of clergy and p. 302 on the amalgamation of parishes.

before death. To die without the last rites was to die unshriven, a perilous state of affairs that condemned the individual's soul to suffering in purgatory and potentially expulsion from heaven at the last judgement. The key miserable component of an unshriven death was the burden of sin. The act of confession and absolution contained in the sacrament of extreme unction removed the stain of sin from the soul and therefore gave the participant a better chance of suffering less in purgatory and being chosen with the lambs to enter heaven at the last judgement.

The activities that constituted sin and placed the soul in peril of eternal suffering were also codified. The seven works of corporal mercy and seven works of spiritual mercy were needed to erase the sin caused by the seven deadly sins (lust, gluttony, avarice, sloth, wrath, envy and pride). These sins displeased God, barred the perpetrator from heaven and gave rise to suffering atonement in purgatory. The wealthy and powerful were at great risk of falling victim to the deadly sins. Avarice was a particular target of late-medieval approbation, there was felt to be great peril for people who did not give help to those in need but held onto their wealth.<sup>46</sup> This found expression in the popularity of the biblical story of Dives and Lazarus.<sup>47</sup>

Augustine described purgatory as a place of waiting where the souls of the dead depended on the charity of the living to relieve their suffering.<sup>48</sup> Purgatory was a place where souls waited for the last judgement, where sins were purged through penance and suffering. The landscape of purgatory was well known to the lay people of London. Not only was it a common subject of sermons preached to crowds in the churchyard or on street corners by Dominican friars, purgatory was also broadcast in the form of visions or revelations, such as the revelation of St Bridget of Sweden, whose popularity is attested to by its regular appearance in common-place books.<sup>49</sup> The pains and torments of purgatory were described with enthusiastic detail. They were, however, quite different to the concept of hell. Purgatory was a place of hope, its trials a purging of sin that prepared a soul for judgement. The advantage of the doctrine of purgatory

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<sup>46</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, p.10.

<sup>47</sup> Luke 16. 19-31. Rawcliffe, "Dives Redeemed?", pp. 1-27.

<sup>48</sup> Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, p. 10; Philippe Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death* trans. Helen Weaver, 2<sup>nd</sup> edn. (New York, 2008), p. 148.

<sup>49</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 338-342.

was that individuals had an opportunity to continue their penitential suffering in atonement for their sins before they were brought to final judgement, thus potentially enabling them to avoid the fires of hell and to enter heaven for eternity.

The population of London were constantly reminded of the sufferings of sinners in purgatory and the damned in Hell. The last judgement was often pictured on a wall or above the rood loft in the parish Church.<sup>50</sup> This mural, sometimes called a 'Doom painting' was an image that was visible as onlookers raised their heads to look at the Host when it was elevated during Mass.<sup>51</sup> The tolling of the bell signifying the passing of a soul and a request for prayer for the deceased's soul was a common occurrence, as was the passing of lengthy funeral processions and the frequent participation in such events. Then there were the anniversary obits, prayers for the dead, yearly confession, the chanting of the chantry priests, images of saints, memorial brasses, and stained-glass windows. The pervasiveness of sin and imminent threat of death and purgatory would have been hard to ignore.

By the mid-fourteenth century purgatory had developed into a sophisticated 'transactional' concept whereby the living could continue to communicate with the dead and ease their suffering in a variety of practical ways by saying prayers, singing psalms, lighting candles and performing acts of charity.<sup>52</sup> This transactional relationship was reflected in contemporary sermons. John Myrc (c.1400) preached on this theme in his sermon for All Souls' Day: 'Thus you should know that three things most help souls out of their suffering: devout praying, almsgiving and masses'.<sup>53</sup>

The concept of purgatory was not just a fearful idea used to control the population, or generate a good income for the Church, through activities such as intercession for the dead and sale of indulgences; it embodied an opportunity for repentant sinners to redeem themselves, actively helped and soothed by the prayers, masses, and charity provided by their earthly loved ones. It provided both hope and a space that enabled transactions to occur between the living and the dead, an arena whereby the living

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<sup>50</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 309.

<sup>51</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 63.

<sup>52</sup> Paul Binski, *Medieval Death: Ritual and Representation* (Ithaca, 1996), p.24.

<sup>53</sup> John Myrc, 'Sermon for All Souls' Day', in Theodor Erbe, ed., *Myrc's Festival, A Collection of Homilies*, 1 Early English Text Society, Extra Series 96 (Oxford, 1905), pp. 269-71.

could, through charitable reduction of the suffering of the poor also play a practical role in the reduction of suffering of those in purgatory.

## 2.3 Piety

The doctrine of purgatory laid an emphasis on the activity of the individual, an emphasis that existed in tension with the established collective nature of medieval Catholicism which focussed on the importance of groups and reciprocal relationships.<sup>54</sup> Indeed Philippe Ariès has argued that the concept of purgatory was borrowed from the Pagan tradition and was perpetuated by lay people who clung to the old idea of a place of waiting and purification.<sup>55</sup> The Londoner, Sir Thomas More (d. 1535) traced the custom of praying for the souls of the dead back to the time of the apostles.<sup>56</sup> Reciprocity and group activity had a role in the doctrine of purgatory in terms of groups coming together to provide charitable relief offered to souls of the dead by the intercession of the living. Despite this, the sins that resulted in time spent in purgatory were the responsibility of each person, on their own. An individual's thoughts and deeds, good or bad, charitable, or sinful, were perceived to have a direct influence on spiritual and physical well-being both in this life and after death.<sup>57</sup>

The avoidance of sin by leading a virtuous life involved commitment: regular attendance at Mass, confessing sins, saying prayers, and performing acts of charity, activities mediated and organised by the Church and centred on the parish. However, the state of one's soul was also a personal matter: it required a certain amount of self-control over thought and behaviour, together with a level of education and understanding to avoid sin and to practise virtue to the standard required by the Church. This understanding of personal responsibility for the state of one's soul applied just as much to the wealthy almshouse founders as the poor almsmen and women who resided in almshouses.<sup>58</sup> As the Middle Ages progressed lay people became increasingly inclined to take personal action to ensure the wellbeing of themselves and their loved ones, both during life and after death, within the parish

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<sup>54</sup> Clive Burgess, 'London, The Church and The Kingdom', p. 101.

<sup>55</sup> Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 146-148.

<sup>56</sup> Thomas More, *The Supplication of Souls*, Sister Mary Thelca ed., (Maryland, 1950), pp. 143-146.

<sup>57</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 309.

<sup>58</sup> Amy Appleford, *Learning to Die in London*, p. 68.

and outside it.<sup>59</sup> These actions were naturally mediated by an individual's level of understanding, belief, education, wealth, temperament, experience, culture, environment, and inclination, and could be undertaken as an individual and as part of an organised group. Many of these activities were expressed as acts of charity and imitated those undertaken by the Church as a corporate entity. Others, and this became increasingly marked as the Middle Ages progressed, were subtly different, and it is at this point of divergence, which encompasses the foundation and running of almshouses, that we can potentially learn so much.

The charitable activities of lay people started with increased involvement in the running of the parish. Despite the clear social stratification and considerable economic differences inherent in late-medieval society there was a deep sense of personal responsibility and connectivity to the local community, parish, and the body politic, at least among the more affluent, as demonstrated by the frequency of donations to the upkeep of bridges, roads and water supply in contemporary wills.<sup>60</sup> By the mid-fourteenth century the laity also took a much greater role in the organisation and administration of key aspects of parish life.<sup>61</sup> The combination of lay wealth and piety within the parishes of London saw considerable growth in the endowment of parish churches, with lay parishioners playing a formative role in the increase of celebration of divine service within the City.<sup>62</sup> Clive Burgess saw this growth in parish participation by the laity as intentional and active, with the purpose of creating a local liturgical environment that aspired to match the rites and observances of established conventional religious institutions.<sup>63</sup> A form of pious one-upmanship that was motivated by a potent mix of faith, pride and the fear of death and purgatory. By the mid-sixteenth century the involvement of the laity in the religious life of the City of London had progressed to such a pitch that '...when the mayor, aldermen and liverymen paraded at Martinmas in 1535, many of the priests surrounding them were their direct or indirect responsibility.'<sup>64</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Ibid, pp. 109-130.

<sup>60</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 90-93.

<sup>61</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, pp. 132-4.

<sup>62</sup> Burgess, 'London, The Church and The Kingdom', pp. 110-116.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Burgess, 'London, The Church and The Kingdom', p. 116.

The motivation of lay people to establish some form of control over the form and delivery of their religious devotions (an arena considered the exclusive responsibility of the Church) did not stop at the church door; they also started joining religious guilds and fraternities and some of these guilds and fraternities founded almshouses. These fraternities were centred on a parish Church, often operating within a Church, and associated with it, but were essentially independent of the Church, being founded and managed by the laity.<sup>65</sup>

There is evidence for the foundation of religious guilds and fraternities in England from the tenth and eleventh centuries and they may well have existed before this time. Fraternities existed in Europe from the Carolingian era, a scattered few before the tenth century, more appearing between the eleventh and twelfth centuries, and a large increase in guild foundation from the fourteenth century.<sup>66</sup> In London, Caroline Barron estimates that there were five fraternities before the Black Death, five more founded between 1349 and 1350 and a further seventy-four between 1350 and 1400, which implies that the plague had a galvanising effect on the population, and the formation of fraternities was, in part at least, a response to it.<sup>67</sup>

The religious guilds and fraternities of the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were formed by groups of lay people, men and women and predominantly artisans, usually within a parish, who came together to venerate a particular saint.<sup>68</sup> The activities of religious guilds as portrayed by the Guild Returns of 1388/9 are heavily weighted towards the provision and maintenance of lights at the altar of their patron saint, the celebration of Mass and feasting on their patron saint's feast-day (and at other times).<sup>69</sup> The development of a close relationship with a saint was very important. Saints sat at the right hand of God in heaven and were a conduit through which the pleas of people on earth could be heard by God. The good works accomplished by

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<sup>65</sup> Caroline Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London' in Caroline M. Barron and Christopher Harper-Bill eds., *The Church in Pre-Reformation Society, Essays in honour of F.R.H. Du Boulay*, (Woodbridge, 1985), p. 19. It would seem that the relationship could be complex with parishioners of a parish in one case at least able to order a parish fraternity to present its accounts regularly.

<sup>66</sup> Bainbridge, *Guilds in the Medieval Countryside*, p. 15.

<sup>67</sup> Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', p. 23.

<sup>68</sup> Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', p. 30.

<sup>69</sup> *English Gilds, The Original Ordinances of more than One Hundred English Gilds*, ed. J. Toulmin Smith et al (London, 1870), p. 127.

saints during their lives and after their deaths, through miracles and cures, acted as a treasury of grace which could be accessed by a penitent worshipping sinner.<sup>70</sup> The relationship between members of the guild and the patron saint was transactional. In return for devotion the saint was expected to plead on behalf of the members of the guild to God and keep their souls from harm.<sup>71</sup>

Religious fraternities, and the craft guilds (and then companies) that evolved from them, were not just concerned with worship and petition of saints.<sup>72</sup> They contained a strong social and community focus, from attendance at feasts and Masses associated with the saint to communal provision of Chantry Masses, attendance at funerals, prayers for the souls of dead members, and the conjoint provision of charity for the living in order to assist members in distress, the founding of almshouses, and the distribution of alms in various forms, for the benefit of members' souls.<sup>73</sup> Membership of a fraternity associated an individual with a religious organisation, albeit a lay organisation, and therefore aligned them more closely with an ideal of religious life.

Almshouses, like many *leprosaria*, often followed a quasi-religious rule based on the rule of the Augustinian Community.<sup>74</sup> Fraternities and guilds also appear to have based their functions and structure on religious communities. Members of a guild were referred to as sisters and brothers and were expected to live in harmony and charity with each other with disputes usually being arbitrated by the leaders of the guild, and support being offered to brethren in distress. Brothers and sisters were expected to behave in a godly way in the external community, to effectively live a *vita activa*, and this extended to their activities in the market-place. As craft guilds and then companies gradually evolved from the fraternities of London, they took on the regulation of the craft and the way their members operated in the market-place, policing quality.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Flynn, *Sacred Charity* p. 13.

<sup>71</sup> Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', p. 32.

<sup>72</sup> Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', pp. 13-17.

<sup>73</sup> Bainbridge, *Guilds in the Medieval Countryside*; John Henderson, *Piety and Charity in Late Medieval Florence* (Chicago, 1994), p. 34.

<sup>74</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, "'A mighty force in the ranks of Christ's army': Intercession and integration in the medieval English leper hospital', in, Elma Brenner and François-Olivier Touati, eds., *Leprosy and identity in the Middle Ages from England to the Mediterranean* (Manchester, 2021) p. 96.

<sup>75</sup> Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', p. 25.



There may have been a conscious element of imitation of mendicant orders in the way fraternities were created and many fraternities in London may have been inspired or directly encouraged by the friars.<sup>76</sup> During the fifteenth century, the friaries became renowned for the quality of their libraries, providing a forum for the acquisition of higher education within the City of London, and found a position for themselves as spiritual advisors and confessors to the merchant and administrative elite and members of the royal court.<sup>77</sup>

The charity of fraternities was personal. Although brethren were often supposed to contribute to a communal fund to provide for lights at the altar, a chantry priest (if they were wealthy enough) and to help each other in distress, the amounts asked for and collected were often small. Some fraternities had corporate income from rents, but Caroline Barron has estimated that there was usually not enough money to finance a viable social security fund, and that members probably relied on each other individually to provide more informal practical support, food and shelter and perhaps work when individual circumstances required it. The Carpenters' Company had an ordinance requiring that, if a member of the company was out of work, they should be given work (if it was available) by other brothers.<sup>78</sup> Charity between members of the fraternities included, importantly, the provision of a decent burial including a good number of lights and torches around the corpse, the provision of communal intercession to petition for mercy after death, attendance and prayers at funerals, monthly obits, and commemorative Masses.

Fraternity members also provided charity for people outside the fraternity by the distribution of alms to the poor, again mimicking to some extent the activities of established religious orders.<sup>79</sup> Many fraternities made a corporate effort to educate the people around them spiritually by putting on plays and sometimes paying for

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<sup>76</sup> Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', p. 23; Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, p. 70.

<sup>77</sup> For a discussion about the property holdings of the mendicants in London see: Nick Holder, 'The Medieval Friaries of London: A topographical and archaeological history, before and after the dissolution' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2011); Jens Röhrkasten, *The Mendicant Houses of Medieval London 1221 – 1539* (Münster, 2004), p. 18.

<sup>78</sup> Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', pp. 17, 21.

<sup>79</sup> Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', p. 26.

sermons or lectures.<sup>80</sup> These activities thus covered three of the spiritual works of mercy at once: instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, and admonishing sinners, while also providing entertainment. This implies a sophisticated understanding of the meaning of charity on the part of the fraternities. The Dominican friars, a prominent presence in London and Westminster, also espoused this approach to charity, preaching on street corners to the population and following the *vita activa* rule of Augustine. Other monastic orders, such as the hospitallers, provided hostels and hospitals to succour the pilgrim and those who were sick and in poverty. Similarly, the foundation of the fraternity schools, hospitals and almshouses demonstrates that lay people understood these concepts and wanted to play a similar charitable role within the local community. For fraternity members, though, most acts of external charity were left to the individual's conscience and included the customary distribution of alms at funerals and the more prosaic and thus unrecorded delivery of alms in the community. Fraternity members as active members of the local parish were in an ideal position to understand the day-to-day pressures of local people and provide aid when and if they were able. This autonomy and self-direction in the provision of charity was an expression of the individual's level of spiritual education and their personal piety.

The penetration and popularity of ideas about purgatory and the afterlife into the consciousness of the general population is demonstrated by the currency of songs that explore these issues. There are many medieval songs that reference the trials of purgatory and the fear of death. One example of this which was in print in 1528 reads:

Wak I or sclep, ete or drynke,  
Whan I on my last end do think,  
For grete fer my sowle do shrynke,  
Timor mortis conturbat me.<sup>81</sup>

These songs appeared in the years following the first appearance of the Black Death. The overwhelming nature of the disease and its devastating death rate shocked the

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<sup>80</sup> J. F. Wadmore, 'The Worshipful Company of Skinners', London', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 5 (1881), pp. 130-231, details the pageant plays performed by the Skinners at Corpus Christi every year. Barron, 'The Parish Fraternities of Medieval London', p. 34.

<sup>81</sup> Bodleian Library, Oxford. MS Eng. Poet. e. l. (SC 29734), ff, 38v-39.

population and brought a stark awareness of the imminence of death and destruction. Songs were not the only sign of this preoccupation. As we have seen, there began to be evidence of investment in life after death in the provision of intercession and memorialisation. Although the impact of the Black Death may have been a catalyst for these changes, it is human nature to adapt to new situations. John Arnold saw the Church's constant attempts to remind people of their sins and the imminence of death as evidence that the fear and trauma of the plague were quickly accommodated and that lay people were not as obsessed with their afterlife as the Church would like.<sup>82</sup> This may well be true, but the Church's unceasing efforts to educate the laity about faith and the consequences of sin started well before the Black Death.

There is a close link between sin and purgatory, the Church, the increasing level of education of the laity and their conceptualisation of charity. Canon twenty-one of the fourth Lateran Council of 1215 made annual confession to a priest compulsory for all members of the Church.<sup>83</sup> This requirement for universal confession resulted in the production of penitential texts designed to guide clergy through the procedure of examining an individual's conscience and assigning appropriate penance. In order to participate fully in the process of confession and penance, the individual needed to understand properly the nature of sin and virtue and the beliefs of the Church. Episcopal legislation in England responded to the new requirements for confession by instigating a nationwide education programme on the basics of the Christian faith. Children were the initial targets of this educational drive with priests, parents and godparents being instructed to teach their children the basics of the Christian faith and their Psalter.<sup>84</sup> Adults were not excluded from this programme and confession was seen as an excellent opportunity to catechize adults and test their knowledge. In 1229 Bishop William Blois of Worcester issued statutes which stipulated that priests should catechize all penitents before confession with the Apostles' Creed, and after confession he should teach the seven deadly sins, to help them remember the type of

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<sup>82</sup> John Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief in Medieval Europe* (London, 2011), p. 167.

<sup>83</sup> Norman P. Tanner, ed., *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, I (Georgetown, 1990), pp. 245-246.

<sup>84</sup> D. Whitelock, M. Brett, C. Brooke, eds., *Councils and Synods with Other Documents Relating to the English Church: A.D. 871-1204* II 1 (Oxford, 1981) p. 713.

sin they were doing penance for.<sup>85</sup> By the mid-thirteenth century manuals were being produced to teach the clergy how to conduct confession and impose appropriate penances for particular sins.

In 1281 a popular manual for parish priests, the *Ignorantia sacerdotum*, written by John Pecham (Peckham), Archbishop of Canterbury, directed priests that in addition to the catechizing of children, they were to teach parishioners the basics of the Catholic faith, which he explained in detail. The curriculum for parishioners, which included the Ten Commandments, vices, virtues, the bodily and spiritual works of charity, the articles of faith and the sacraments, was to be taught four times a year.<sup>86</sup> This manual enjoyed widespread popularity and was translated into English by John Thoresby, Archbishop of Canterbury, in 1357 and published with the title 'The Lay Folks' Catechism', with the instruction that it should be read to parishioners every Sunday.<sup>87</sup>

It was difficult to escape this mass compulsory education programme; in order to participate in society, Church membership was required along with attending confession and receiving the Eucharist at Easter. The result was an increase in the numbers of lay people who, even if they could not read Latin, knew the tenets of the Christian faith and the link of sin with death and damnation, and the importance of public and private demonstrations of charity as an indicator of godliness, a form of penance and as a route to forgiveness and redemption. Thoresby repeatedly referred to the central importance of charity in the Christian life. He wrote of the ghostly (spiritual) works:

Thise til our neghtebors er ful nedfull  
And to tham that doe tham wonder medeful  
For he sal find merci that mercifull is,  
And man withouten merci of merci sal misse.<sup>88</sup>

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<sup>85</sup> Marjorie Curry Woods and Rita Copeland, 'Classroom and Confession', in David Wallace ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 391.

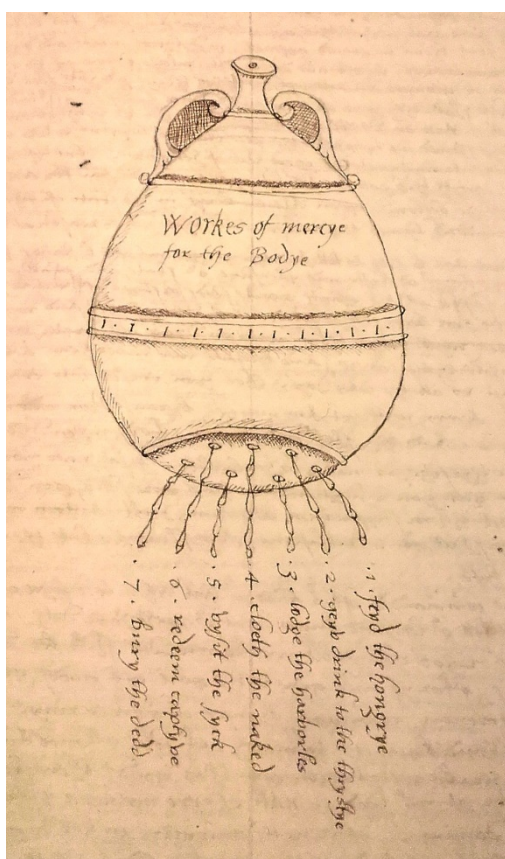
<sup>86</sup> Arnold, *Belief and Unbelief*, p. 35.

<sup>87</sup> *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, T. F. Simmons and H. E. Nolloth eds., The Early English Text Society Original Series, 118 (Oxford, 1901).

<sup>88</sup> *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, p. 76.

In order to encourage lay members of the congregation to learn the contents of 'The Lay Folks' Catechism' it promised an indulgence:

Our fadir the eicebisshop graunts of his grace  
 Fourti daies of pardon til al that larnes than,  
 Or dos their gode diligence for to lun than.<sup>89</sup>



**Figure 2.1: Works of Bodily Mercy** ('MR. [Hugh] Halles a priestes discourse of gardeninge applied to a spirituall vnderstandinge' BL Royal MS 18 C III 1581-1590)

'The Lay Folks' Catechism' became very popular and was frequently adapted into other penitential and educational works. It rapidly passed into general circulation and was read by the laity, perhaps even more than the clergy.<sup>90</sup> Other penitential works that had a lay readership include the *Speculum Christiani* and 'The Prick of Conscience'. There are over 100 surviving manuscripts of 'The Prick of Conscience', which attests to its enduring attraction to owners.<sup>91</sup>

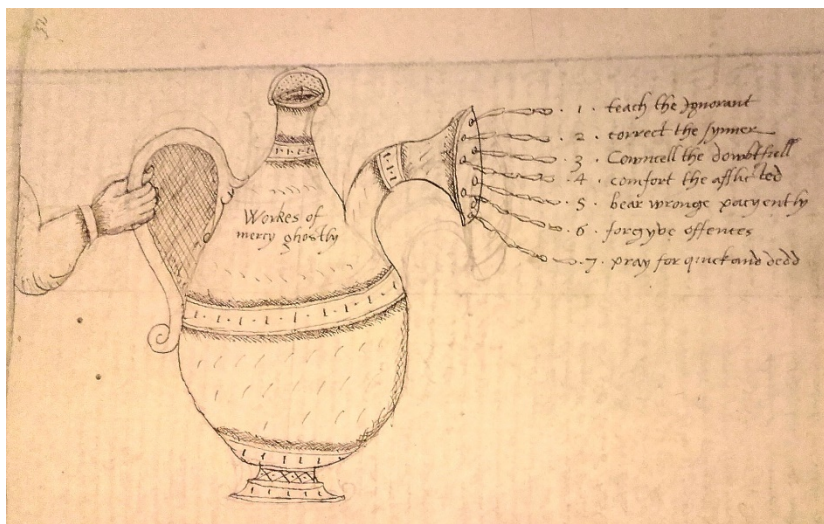
This ecclesiastical education program continued after the Dissolution. In the late sixteenth century a priest, Hugh Halles, wrote a treatise on spirituality in which he used familiar concepts associated with gardening to help his parishioners understand key ideas. He depicted the works of bodily (see figure 2.1 above) and

spiritual (see figure 2.2 below) mercy in the form of gardening watering cans, sprinkling healing charity on the earth.

<sup>89</sup> *The Lay Folks' Catechism*, p. 98.

<sup>90</sup> Robert Swanson, *Religion and Devotion in Europe, c. 1215 – c. 1515* (Cambridge, 1995), p. 60.

<sup>91</sup> Woods and Copeland, 'Classroom and Confession', p. 398.



**Figure 2.2: *Workes of Ghostly Mercy*** ('MR. [Hugh] Halles a priestes discourse of gardeninge applied to a spirituall vnderstandinge' BL Royal MS 18 C III 1581-1590)

The extent of literacy in the population of London between 1330 and 1600 is the subject of much debate.<sup>92</sup> Certainly the people of London were more likely to be literate than people in rural areas. The London populace was diverse, including clerics, gentry,

civil servants, merchants, artisans, paupers, vagrants, and foreigners. Many of the poorer people of London, parish clerks, for example, depended on literacy for their living.<sup>93</sup> The definition of being literate in 1330 involved the ability to read Latin. By 1550 English was much more widely used and many ordinary townspeople had acquired the ability to read.<sup>94</sup> A customs account for 1480 lists the import of 900 printed books and thirty gross of spectacles; and literacy among women was attested to by the frequency with which they bequeathed books in their wills, though this applies mostly to the middling sort and above.<sup>95</sup> Libraries were established in London from the early fourteenth century at the friaries and other religious institutions and some parishes also had lending libraries, although it is unclear if many people below the level of merchant or burgess benefited from them.<sup>96</sup> Religious texts were the most popular books owned by the people of London.<sup>97</sup> The currency of the concept of charity contained in these texts is underlined by the popularity of the 'Dives and

<sup>92</sup> D.H. Green, *Women Readers in the Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 2007), pp. 3-8, gives a good overview of the debate.

<sup>93</sup> Sheila Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practice' in D. Wallace ed., *The Cambridge History of Medieval English Literature* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 287.

<sup>94</sup> Barron, 'Expansion of Education in Fifteenth-Century London', p. 221.

<sup>95</sup> Barron, 'Expansion of Education in Fifteenth-Century London', p. 243; J. Boffey and C. M. Meale, 'Selecting the Text: Rawlinson C86 and some other books for London Readers', in F. Riddey, ed., *Regionalism in Late Medieval Manuscripts and Texts* (Cambridge, 1991), pp. 143-69.

<sup>96</sup> Barron, 'Expansion of Education in Fifteenth-Century London', p. 240.

<sup>97</sup> Lindenbaum, 'London Texts and Literate Practice', p. 303.

Pauper' text and its appearance in common-place books, such this proverb recorded by Richard Hill in the early sixteenth century:

O thow riche man  
Pou shalt not always leve.  
O diues, diues '*non omni tempore viues*'.<sup>98</sup>

For those who could not read there were other ways to access information about sin, death, love and charity. Thoresby described the seventh work of ghostly mercy as:

The seuent, when men askes us for to her tham,  
if we can more than thi fer to lere tham.<sup>99</sup>

The seventh work of ghostly (spiritual) mercy in this list is to instruct the ignorant. Reading improving works to family, servants and apprentices during meals and at morning or evening devotion was recommended by many conduct books and indulgences were granted for reading such works to educate others and for the people listening to them.<sup>100</sup> People could participate in works of religious drama such as the passion plays.<sup>101</sup> Works could also be learnt by heart. 'The Lay Folks Catechism' and many other works like it are written in rhyming couplets to aid memorisation. Children were also taught to memorise the seven Penitential Psalms.<sup>102</sup>

The Penitential Psalms had a prominent place in late-medieval England. They were repeated by many people on a daily basis. They were used in three key ways. Firstly, multiple repetitions were required as a work of satisfaction by priests at confession; they speak of the misery of sin and the justice of God's punishment. Psalm 37 relates physical pain and sickness of the body to sin and the 'just' anger of God and expresses a longing for forgiveness. The Penitential Psalms were also used by the laity privately to maintain the health of their souls between confessions, and as intercessory prayers for the souls of the dead. They were repeated with the Office of the Dead, while

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<sup>98</sup> Roman Dyboski ed., *Songs, Carols, and other Miscellaneous Poems From the Balliol Ms. 354, Richard Hill's Commonplace-Book* (London, 1908) p. 130.

<sup>99</sup> *Lay Folk's Catechism*, p. 76.

<sup>100</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 289.

<sup>101</sup> Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, p. 141.

<sup>102</sup> The Penitential Psalms are Psalms 6, 31, 37, 50, 101, 129 and 142.

keeping vigil round a body, and by the congregation at funerals, by the grave and at mortuary Masses.<sup>103</sup> The ubiquitousness of the Penitential Psalms from the fourteenth century onwards indicates a pervasive sense of the danger of sin among the laity both before and after death and serves as a context in which to view their acts of charity.

Lay medieval people were therefore immersed in a culture that emphasised the peril that awaited the unredeemed sinner and presented works of spiritual and bodily charity as an effective method of rescue. Other religious and cultural factors were also at work. These encouraged people with a pull rather than a push to engage in works of charity. Role models of people behaving in a charitable manner were plentiful and the preaching friars worked hard to ensure that virtuous lives were advertised widely: dramatically, verbally (through preaching and storytelling), and in writing. An activity backed up by scripture:

‘Beloved do not imitate what is evil but imitate what is good. Whoever does good is from God; whoever does evil has not seen God.’<sup>104</sup>

The most obvious life of virtue that was promoted as a model for secular and religious behaviour was the life of Christ. The friars created an ‘edifice of piously imagined biography’ based around the Gospel texts which they used as a basis for preaching.<sup>105</sup> Christ was presented in many ways in these stories, including ‘Christ the Pauper’, ‘Christ the Physician’ and ‘The Man of Sorrows’. Preachers used these images to encourage and galvanise their audience to perform works of mercy.<sup>106</sup> For example, A. J. Davis relates how thirteenth-century hospital sermons evoked the image of Christ the Pauper and Christ the Physician. This image equated the suffering of the sick and poor with the suffering of Christ, it gave meaning to both poverty and suffering. Christ lived in poverty and so by living in poverty the individual was living like Christ. Also, the suffering implicit in sickness imitates the suffering of Christ which means enduring

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<sup>103</sup> Clare Costley King’oo, *Miserere Mei: The Penitential Psalms in Late Medieval and Early Modern England* (Indiana, 2012), pp. 7-19.

<sup>104</sup> 3 John 11-12.

<sup>105</sup> John V. Fleming, ‘The Friars and Medieval English Literature’ in D. Wallace ed., *Cambridge History of Medieval Literature* (Cambridge, 1999), p. 371.

<sup>106</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, ‘Christ the Physician Walks the Wards: Celestial Therapeutics in the Medieval Hospital’, in Davies and Prescott, *London and the Kingdom*, pp. 78-97, describes the importance of the theme of *Christus Medicus* to English Hospitals.



sickness results in both the performance of a work of satisfaction and drawing closer to Christ. Additionally, this image equates helping the sick as a donor or a worker with not only performing a work of mercy that was redemptive for the soul, but also imitating Christ the Physician who healed the sick. Therefore, helping the sick involved physically helping the Son of God, in the form of the poor sick, and drawing nearer to him spiritually. An early thirteenth-century sermon by Guillaume de Chartres captured this idea:

We ought to receive Christ in our arms through good works, especially through works of mercy, by leading them [the poor] to our house and serving and warming them. Then may we dwell near the same Christ, when we support the poor with our alms.<sup>107</sup>

In her examination of various fourteenth and fifteenth-century literary works of religious piety Nicole Rice found that the form of these works created a 'matrix' for mutual imitation between lay reader, clerical author, and Christ.<sup>108</sup>

Inspirational lives did not stop at the holy family. Books of hagiography such as *The Golden Legend* were immensely popular with the laity and the saints were also frequently held up in sermons as a model for living.<sup>109</sup> *The Golden Legend*, an encyclopaedia of theological information and hagiography dating from the mid-thirteenth century, was originally written for the use of priests, but, like the 'Lay Folks' Catechism', was quickly adopted by the secular world. The saints' lives portrayed in it mimic the life of Christ or the Apostles in one or more aspects. This often involved suffering, enduring faith, the renunciation of worldly affairs, or chastity, but it also involved acts of charity and healing. For example, St Julian expunged the sin of unwittingly murdering his parents by establishing a hospice and helping travellers to cross a dangerous river. After years of this charitable work Julian was visited by a leprous beggar, whom he cared for and who turned out to be a messenger from God

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<sup>107</sup> A. J. Davis, 'Preaching in thirteenth-century hospitals', *Journal of Medieval History* 36 (2010), p. 77.

<sup>108</sup> Rice, *Lay Piety and Religious Discipline in Middle English Literature*, p. 53.

<sup>109</sup> Over 1000 copies of *Legenda Aurea* survive in Latin with over 500 in European vernacular languages. E. Duffy, 'Introduction', in Jacobus de Voragine, *The Golden Legend: Readings on the Saints*, trans. William Granger Ryan (Princeton, 1993), p. xi.

to tell him he was forgiven.<sup>110</sup> Charity was depicted in *The Golden Legend* as a work of love and therefore a demonstration that the individual was both loved by God and doing God's work.

Carolyn Muessig's examination of the sermon in the Middle Ages found that models of holiness in medieval sermons were often related in a way that invited the audience to imitate them and that, in contrast to hagiography, which tends to focus on the salient points of a saint's life, sermons on the same subject focussed on virtue and 'imitable holiness'. This point of view was supported by Maureen Flynn, who suggested that imitation by the laity was an 'an effective and powerful testimony of faith', and Frances Yates, who interpreted these works as 'indelible images or codes on the mind which could be imitated as models of virtuous conduct'.<sup>111</sup>

Other influences on ideas about charity can be found in secular works, popular romances and tales about chivalry. Contrary to the current stereotypical idea of romance readers, most late-medieval owners of such works were men, usually aristocrats or merchants. Romances were rarely owned by the lower orders of society, but rather by people who had civic responsibility. The London merchants particularly favoured Arthurian legends and works such as *Ipomedon*, the prose of Merlin, and the Siege of Thebes, with romances and works on chivalry often being bound together. Interestingly there was a noticeable trend towards chivalry among the aldermen and civic leaders of London in the late fifteenth century.<sup>112</sup>

Chivalric and romantic stories and manuals reinforced ideas about the nature of charity in a number of key ways. Firstly, they embodied ideas about generous lordship, reinforcing the stratification of society through the concept of lordly generous gift giving to the poor, who would return the gift with loyalty. *The Romance of the Rose*, a thirteenth-century French romance, which aims to contain the 'whole art of love' for

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<sup>110</sup> This is the second St Julian mentioned in the text with by far the more interesting story. Voragine, *The Golden Legend*, p. 128.

<sup>111</sup> Carolyn Muessig, 'Sermon, preacher and society in the Middle Ages', *Journal of Medieval History* 28 (2002), p. 88; Flynn, *Sacred Charity*, p. 70; Frances Yates, *The Art of Memory* (Chicago, 1966), chs. III and IV.

<sup>112</sup> Lindenbaum, *London Texts and Literate Practice*, p. 301.

the edification of young men, exemplifies this idea in its portrayal of the character Largesse:

Next came Largesse, who was well trained and instructed in the art of doing honour and spending money. She was of Alexander's line, and was never happier than when she could say 'Take this.' Even wretched Avarice was not so anxious to take as Largesse was to give, and God caused her wealth to multiply, so that, however much she gave away, she always had more. Largesse was greatly praised and esteemed; she had achieved so much by her generous gifts that wise and foolish alike were entirely at her mercy.<sup>113</sup>

Here Largesse, the generous giving of gifts or charity, is portrayed as having a royal lineage; Alexander the Great, the mighty emperor and conqueror, is her ancestor. Largesse is therefore noble and honourable. Avarice, the hoarding of money, is conversely described as 'wretched'. Largesse is such a noble virtue that God rewards it by multiplying her wealth and bestowing on her praise and esteem. Secondary benefits of Largesse are the influence she gains with all people. Largesse, a virtue which appears to be an amalgam of the ancient practice of gift-giving and the religious concept of charity, is presented here as a key virtue of a chivalric knight.

Romances could also be used as conduct guides; they often included detailed descriptions of the ideal behaviour of both chivalric knights and noble ladies. Conduct books were perhaps the most popular secular works in the late-medieval period. They could range from books of instructions about how to drink your wine or carve at table to rules about how to order your life in a pious way. Interest in codes of conduct was so intense that almost any book could be mined for what it had to say about them. Romances, the poetry of Chaucer (himself a Londoner), *The Golden Legend*, and other pious works were all likely sources of information about how to behave.<sup>114</sup> Acts of charity in these stories are portrayed as evidence of noble birth and superior character. Therefore, those wishing to display their knightly nature should also perform acts of charity. The use of acts of charity as evidence for superior learning and

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<sup>113</sup> *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford, 1994), p. 18.

<sup>114</sup> Lindenbaum, *London Texts and Literate Practice*, p. 305.

nobility was not limited to the laity. The state also wanted to display its superior understanding, particularly in the form of Christian Humanism.

Developments in philosophy also contributed to the expression of lay piety in the late-Middle Ages. The emergence of the concept of Christian Humanism in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries had a profound influence on policy-makers within the English State. The concept of Christian Humanism is hard to pin down; its principal advocates often disagreed with each other.<sup>115</sup> The term Humanism encompasses the intellectual developments of the Renaissance, including the 'rediscovery' and analysis of ancient writers, such as Plato and Seneca, along with the Old and New Testaments and early Christian writers, such as Augustine, Jerome and Ambrose. Christian Humanism was a diverse movement and inspired the development of both Protestant and Catholic theology, each with the aim of the revival of Christianity. The one thing that Christian humanists agreed on was the central importance of education, the rejection of ignorance and superstition, and the importance of higher standards of lay piety. Christian humanists, such as Juan Luis Vives, who spent time in England at the Court of Henry VIII, based their morality upon the teachings of Jesus, and the concept of charity was of central importance. Vives argued that a just Christian State was responsible for the wellbeing of all its citizens and therefore the state had a responsibility to intervene, by influence or direct action, to help the poorest and least able to look after themselves.<sup>116</sup>

Thomas More, a friend of Juan Luis Vives, also wrote extensively on the value of Christian humanism. More was a Londoner, under-sheriff of London 1510-1518, a Member of Parliament for London and Middlesex in 1504, 1510 and 1523, speaker of the House of Commons in 1523, an influential adviser to Henry VIII and Lord Chancellor 1525-1532.<sup>117</sup> In *Utopia*, Thomas More's popular fictional depiction of an 'ideal' society, Christian humanist ideas of the state's responsibility for the wellbeing of all its

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<sup>115</sup> Brendan Bradshaw, 'The Christian Humanism of Erasmus', *The Journal of Theological Studies* 33, 2 (October 1982), p. 411.

<sup>116</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, p. 21; Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 351.

<sup>117</sup> Helen Miller, 'More, Thomas I (1477/78-1535), of London and Chelsea, Mdx.' in S. T. Bindoff ed., *The History of Parliament: The House of Commons 1509-1558* (Woodbridge, 1982) <https://www.historyofparliamentonline.org/volume/1509-1558/member/more-thomas-i-147778-1535> [accessed 19th December 2020]

citizens sit at the heart of the organisation of society. Health care is a core facet of this ideal society, and it is high quality, free and available to all. Thomas More used his influence to promote the idea of the State's duty to intervene to protect health in the real world and was influential in the 1512 bill on hospital reform and the first regulations for the containment of contagious infections introduced in London in 1518.<sup>118</sup>

As we have seen, the concept of charity was ubiquitous in the late-Middle Ages, held up as a model of good living and as a Christian duty. The expression of charity demonstrated knowledge, social position, and piety. It was an essential aspect of everyday life and something Christians would be called to account for on at least a yearly basis in confession. Which leads us to the question: given the extent of poverty in the late-Middle Ages, how did Church, state and laity respond to it?

## 2.4 Responses to Poverty

The Church was the architect of the first responses to poverty and very influential in the perception of poverty among the laity. The Church's response became a model, increasingly imitated, and adapted by both state and laity as the Middle Ages progressed. The provision of charity was central to the Catholic Church at many levels, but in many ways is hard to chart. Both poverty and charity were a normal part of everyday life, taken for granted and so rarely recorded.

The contemplative monastic institutions provided alms to the poor in many forms. Left-over food from the monks' table was distributed to the poor at the gate. Three portions of food were distributed on a daily basis by the monks of Westminster Abbey along with other food, such as the portions of deceased monks (which were provided for at least thirty days after their death) and on the annual anniversary for deceased monks.<sup>119</sup> The poor who were too sick or infirm to travel to the monastery gates were not forgotten. At Westminster Abbey the almoner had a special duty to find these

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<sup>118</sup> TNA, E 175/11/65. Carole Rawcliffe, 'A Crisis of Confidence? Parliament and the Demand for Hospital Reform in Early-15th and Early-16<sup>th</sup> Century England', *Parliamentary History*, (June 2016), 35, 2, pp. 105-106. Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 298.

<sup>119</sup> Barbara Harvey gives a detailed description of the distribution of food to the poor by monks. Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, pp. 12-15; Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, p. 81.

people and ensure they received aid.<sup>120</sup> Barbara Harvey described some discrimination in the alms-giving of monastic institutions. For example, the monks of Beaulieu Abbey denied alms to prostitutes unless there was a famine and no able-bodied pauper was to receive alms during the time of harvest when help was needed to get the crops in.<sup>121</sup> Traditional monastic institutions also had a duty to provide hospitality for poor travellers and pilgrims. To this end many monasteries, including Westminster Abbey, established an 'almonry' where poor pilgrims arriving on foot could be given food and shelter for the night. Some poor people were also admitted to the almonry as residents; this was certainly true at Westminster Abbey where income was assigned to the '*paupers elemosinarie*' from the middle of the twelfth century. Barbara Harvey suggested that the almonries sometimes developed into a type of hospital and that resident 'almsmen' could become formally associated with the monastery as lay brethren. At Westminster Abbey, these almsmen benefited from the services of a secular priest who was himself an almsman, and perhaps it was there in the monastic precinct that we can find one of the origins of almshouses.<sup>122</sup>

The friars had a different focus in their approach to poverty. On joining their orders mendicants were supposed to give up all their worldly goods and become, voluntarily, paupers. Mendicants ostensibly lived on the grace of God, begging for their daily sustenance, and serving the community from a position of poverty and dependence. Therefore, they focussed on acts of charity that did not require money, and on the spiritual works of mercy: forgiving sins, admonishing sinners, instructing the ignorant, counselling the doubtful, bearing wrongs patiently, comforting the afflicted and praying for the living and the dead, became their prime calling. This expressed itself in different ways for each of the orders; the Dominicans in particular were known for their preaching, but all the mendicant orders prized teaching, learning, advising, joining with prayers and processions for the dead and hearing confessions.<sup>123</sup> The mendicant orders also had a part in the provision of the corporal works of mercy, encouraging the foundation of schools, hospitals and almshouses, and the generous

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<sup>120</sup> Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, p. 18.

<sup>121</sup> Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, p. 22.

<sup>122</sup> Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, p. 18.

<sup>123</sup> Röhrkasten, *The Mendicant Houses of Medieval London*, p. 225.

distribution of alms through their preaching and teaching, though there was a duality of motivation in the call to provide alms for the poor as they themselves depended on such generosity for their survival.

The mendicant orders had three levels of membership. The first order of mendicants comprised the male friars; the second associated orders of nuns such as the order of St Clare, the female order of Franciscans. The third order, sometimes referred to as 'tertiaries', comprised members of the laity who took revocable vows, wore a distinguishing form of dress and tried to live lives of piety and charitable service to the community. Many members of the tertiary orders remained in their own homes. Tertiaries were active all over Christian Europe and took an active role in the distribution of alms and the founding of charitable institutions such as hospitals and almshouses.<sup>124</sup> Other lay religious orders were unaffiliated to a recognised religious order. Groups such as the Beguines of Northern Europe took temporary vows of chastity and simplicity of lifestyle, wore a habit, and dedicated themselves to charitable works. The Beguines also might live at home or with a group and they usually worked within their local community distributing alms and doing good works.<sup>125</sup>

The Church also made efforts to help those in need. At a corporate level the *Decretum* states that the bishop of a diocese was ultimately responsible for the hospitality of the poor in his area.<sup>126</sup> The term 'hospitality' was central to this responsibility and parish priests were required to 'keep hospitality' in the same sense that monastic establishments were hospitable; they were expected to look after travellers and pilgrims and care for the poor.<sup>127</sup> The parish existed as an individual economic unit with income from tithes, donations, oblations and land rents and out of this the parish priest had to live, and look after the poor of the parish. Before the Reformation a third of a priest's income was supposed to be given in alms and hospitality to the poor, though, as Christopher Harper-Bill points out, the poverty of many livings meant that

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<sup>124</sup> Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, p. 24.

<sup>125</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, p. 185.

<sup>126</sup> Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, pp. 68-71.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.

few could have achieved such a high level of giving.<sup>128</sup> Tierney surmises that most parishes were able to provide at least some relief for the local poor in accordance with the eight articles produced by Archbishop Peckham in 1287. The third article states that the parish clergy should:

...provide for the bodily necessities of the poor and needy, especially for those of their cure, according as the resources of the Church suffice.<sup>129</sup>

Priests could be, and were, reprimanded if they failed in their duty to the poor, but there seem to be few examples of this. The provision of alms was part of a priest's duty and expected by parishioners. It appears that most priests at least attempted to fulfil this expectation.

The fervour for the provision of charitable relief to souls in purgatory had a secondary charitable effect in the world of the living. Chantries and chantry priests were also a source of alms and charity for the local community. Often established and funded by the laity, chantries were established with a priest, or a number of priests who were paid to say Mass and pray for the soul of an individual, family or group. Charity, as a core form of purgatorial relief was often part of the chantry foundation and chantry priests sometimes helped the poor, said Mass for parishioners, taught local children and a few ran hospitals. The survey of chantries in 1540 prior to their suppression found that, in returns from seventeen counties and London, 107 chantries gave alms to the poor.<sup>130</sup>

The state's response to poverty started in the late fourteenth century and was prompted by problems with the labour market. Black Death had killed off many of the sick and vulnerable (as well as the rich and healthy) and, as more work was available, peasants had more opportunity to pick and choose which jobs they were willing to do.<sup>131</sup> Many people had lost the most important thing that tied them to a particular location, their families and friends, and so it was easier to leave and seek better

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<sup>128</sup> Christopher Harper-Bill, *The Pre-Reformation Church in England 1400- 1530* (London, 1989), pp. 44-48.

<sup>129</sup> Stephan Kuttner and Eleanor Rathbone, 'Anglo-Norman Canonists of the Twelfth Century', *Traditio* 7 (1949-1952) p. 352.

<sup>130</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, p. 29; Alan Krieder, *English Chantries: The Road to Dissolution* (Cambridge MA, 1979), pp. 64-66.

<sup>131</sup> Hatcher, 'England in the Aftermath of the Black Death', p. 33.



conditions in a new place. The increasing movement of people around the country and the fear of a rise in wages caused great anxiety for the ruling elite and in 1349 the state intervened by passing the Ordinance of Labourers.<sup>132</sup> The Ordinance of Labourers tried to prevent people from moving to seek higher wages and in order to make it more difficult for them to travel it banned giving alms to able-bodied beggars on pain of imprisonment.<sup>133</sup>

A parliamentary statute of 1388 tried to clarify the position about beggars.<sup>134</sup> Even impotent beggars were banned from travelling around the country, but it was not a crime to give alms to them. Clearly the provision of alms to beggars was widespread, and the state realised the importance of private alms-giving in the maintenance of people in poverty. The lack of success of the Ordinance of Labourers, as demonstrated by the increase in internal migration throughout the fifteenth century, seems to have deterred the state from further attempts at legislating a solution to the problem of the vagrant poor. A further law was passed in 1391 which made it a legal requirement that a sum of money should be distributed to the poor in each parish yearly. Tierney saw this move as an attempt by the secular government to enforce existing Canon law. The provision of alms for the poor was viewed as the responsibility of the Church. The state was trying to remind local priests of their duty and push them towards fulfilling it.<sup>135</sup> After the act of 1391 no further legislation relating to the poor was passed until 1495, over 100 years later. The Act against Vagabonds and Beggars of 1494 sought to revise the terms of the Ordinance of Labourers; rather than punishment by imprisonment, which was seen as too costly, vagabonds and beggars were to be punished in the parish stocks. All the impotent poor were required to return to their home parish where they would be allowed to beg but not to leave.<sup>136</sup>

By 1530 the rising population and consequent lack of work was placing increasing pressure on the provision of poor relief by the parish. Urban parishes were under particular pressure as increasing numbers of poor migrants went to the towns looking

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<sup>132</sup> Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, p. 129.

<sup>133</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, pp. 287-9.

<sup>134</sup> Horrox, *The Black Death*, pp. 323-6.

<sup>135</sup> Tierney, *Medieval Poor Law*, p. 129.

<sup>136</sup> A. L. Beier, *The Problem of the Poor in Tudor and Early Stuart England* (New York, 1983), p. 23.

for work. The state's response to this increase in the numbers of the wandering poor was to become more punitive in its treatment of beggars.<sup>137</sup> The 1531 Act concerning the punishment of beggars and vagabonds stated that able-bodied beggars were to be whipped. The impotent and aged poor were to be surveyed and licensed to beg by local justices and if they left their licenced parish they also were to be whipped or placed in the stocks.<sup>138</sup> In 1536 another Act, concerning the punishment of sturdy vagabonds and beggars came into effect. The provision of casual giving of alms to the poor was prohibited. Instead, alms were to be collected by the churchwardens in a regular manner and used centrally to support the impotent poor and provide work for the able-bodied. Those fit people who persistently begged were to be punished by hard labour.<sup>139</sup> This act established the legal responsibility of each parish for the poor living in it.

The advent of the Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries had the effect of intensifying the problem of vagrancy and begging. Many religious charitable organisations such as almonries, hospitals and schools were swept away by the Dissolution. The help provided by these institutions may have been variable in quality and at a low level, but it was ubiquitous and regular and well understood by those who depended upon it. The state's somewhat desperate response to the growing problem of the poor and destitute was to pass another act. The 1547 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and the Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons was a mixture of poor relief and more punitive punishment. 'Sturdy' beggars, those considered able to work, could be enslaved for two years or for life if they ran away. They were also to be branded on the chest with a letter 'V'. These harsh conditions were to be ameliorated by the establishment of cottages in each parish for the relief of the aged and impotent and the establishment of weekly alms collections accompanied by exhortations to give generously by the parish priest.<sup>140</sup> Fortunately wise counsel prevailed and in 1549 an Act Touching the Punishment of Vagabonds and other Idle Persons repealed the

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<sup>137</sup> Slack, *Poverty and Policy*, p. 9.

<sup>138</sup> 22 Henry VIII, c 12, A. Luders et al, eds., *The Statutes of the Realm*, 11 vols (London, 1810-1828), III, pp. 328-330.

<sup>139</sup> 27 Henry VIII c 25, Luders, *Statutes of the Realm* III, pp. 558-564.

<sup>140</sup> 1 Edward VI c 3, Luders, *Statutes of the Realm* IV 1, pp. 5-8.

vagrancy clauses of the 1547 act and re-enacted the parts concerning the provision of cottages for the impotent and aged and weekly collections for their relief.<sup>141</sup>

The situation remained difficult and in 1552 another Act for the Provision of Relief of the Poor was passed.<sup>142</sup> This act said that no one was allowed to beg openly, and that local authorities and householders were to nominate two collectors of alms who were to go round to each house in a parish and collect alms for the local poor every Sunday. People who refused to contribute were to be persuaded by ministers and then the Bishop and records were to be kept both of the names of the poor and the contributors to the fund. The move towards local taxation for poor relief was finally completed in 1563 with an Act that provided for the compulsory assessment and contribution of funds towards poor relief in the parish with the punishment of imprisonment for those who refused to contribute.<sup>143</sup>

Lawrence Poos' work on 'The Social Context of the Statute of Labourers Enforcement', made the case that the Ordinance of Labourers was important to people from the 'upper ranks of village society' in rural areas who, like the aristocracy and gentry, also needed to employ labour.<sup>144</sup> Similarly, the urban merchants and artisans of London were affected by the labour shortage following the Black Death. Frank Rexroth theorised that civic authorities in London presented themselves as the King's deputies in 'supervising the peace' in this context, and used the Ordinances to vilify the indigent poor, whom they characterised as 'sturdy beggars' in the same category as persons of ill repute. Rexroth saw this as an attempt to emphasise difference and 'protect' what the civic elite considered legitimate social groups within the city.<sup>145</sup> He identified this as the commencement of a civic programme of coercion and control of the poor and 'deviant' in London that became internalised by the citizens of the city.

However, the laity continued to play a large role in the day-to-day relief of poverty in the community. Marjorie McIntosh suggested that local people had a far greater

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<sup>141</sup> 3 Edward VI c16, Luders, *Statutes of the Realm* IV 1, pp. 115-117.

<sup>142</sup> 5 Edward VI c2, Luders, *Statutes of the Realm* IV 1, pp. 131-132.

<sup>143</sup> 5 Elizabeth c 3, Luders, *Statutes of the Realm* IV 1, pp. 411-414.

<sup>144</sup> Lawrence R. Poos, 'The Social Context of Statute of Labourers Enforcement', *Law and History Review* 1 (1983), p. 35.

<sup>145</sup> Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 73.

significance than even the Church in determining the response to poverty and that the concept of charity was key. She described how prominent local families often took a leading role in communities, determining charitable provision within the community along with many other issues, and asserted that it is a distortion to draw a distinction between private charity and public assistance, as many private donations were administered by local officials and private alms were considered the foundation of poor support to be supplemented if necessary, by public aid.<sup>146</sup>

As we have seen, the provision of charity was considered a fundamental duty of every Christian, part of his essential role in the body politic, to maintain order in society and create an environment that represented a healthy whole. The expression of this duty can be found in the wills of the better off, leaving money for public works, the maintenance of bridges and roads and for alms to the poor.<sup>147</sup> The laity were increasingly involved in the management of parish affairs as churchwardens and through their participation in fraternities. This led to an influential role in the distribution of poor relief, making practical decisions on the ground about who was worthy of receiving help. Lay people involved in the management of the parish were in a position to be flexible about the application of the law of the land, choosing occasionally to help able-bodied beggars rather than have them punished. Thus, the mechanisms through which poor relief was given became entwined and the cooperation of Church, state, and laity started well before the Reformation.<sup>148</sup>

Many ordinary people participated in small practical acts of charity every day, mostly unnoticed and unrecorded, anything from giving a stranger a drink or piece of bread, a coin to a beggar, giving work to a neighbour fallen on hard times, providing alms for the poor at a funeral, saying the office of the dead for a friend, contributing a small amount of money to a guild (or company) and helping to found a school or almshouse, supporting an aging servant or taking in a neighbour's orphaned children.<sup>149</sup> The

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<sup>146</sup> McIntosh, 'Local Responses to the poor', p. 211.

<sup>147</sup> Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, pp. 249 – 257.

<sup>148</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, p. 12.

<sup>149</sup> Caroline Barron and Anne Sutton eds., *Medieval London Widows 1300 – 1500* (London, 1994), p. 92.

business of charity and the relief of poverty were intricately woven into the warp and weft of everyday life.

## 2.5 Conclusion

Poverty was a condition that could affect nearly anyone in the late-Middle Ages. Life events such as illness, accident, famine, or death could severely hamper a family's ability to feed itself and find shelter or clothing. It was not a condition that was exclusively linked to the poor, life events such as a member of the close family dying, accidents, fire or theft could ruin people from any walk of life. The pattern of poverty changed over the period 1330 - 1600, with the Black Death escalating changes that were already in progress. Initially the incidence of poverty fell, with less competition for work, the standard of living rose, but this caused a rise in internal migration, with people moving to seek higher wages. The increase in poor people leaving their homes and travelling the country caused anxiety among the powerful and this translated into an increase in negative feelings towards vagrants and able-bodied people begging on the streets. By the mid-fifteenth century the population began to recover, and work became harder to find. This, combined with returning soldiers, again increased both the numbers of wandering poor and the general level of poverty across the country. The situation in towns was particularly acute. The Reformation and the Dissolution of the Monasteries and Chantries only made the situation worse, removing the traditional sources of alms and refuge for wandering people in need.

The concept of charity was drawn from the Bible, particularly the life of Christ, and codified into the seven works of corporal mercy and the seven works of spiritual mercy. Religious teaching defined a work of charity and then set the framework around which works of charity could be evaluated and understood through stories and preaching. Pull factors encouraged people to perform works of mercy, the idea of charity as an expression of God's love for people and also an individual's love for God; and push factors such as the fear of sin, death, purgatory and hell, the punishment for sin, compelled people towards charity as they could be avoided by performing acts of charity with a loving heart. The concept of purgatory was a powerful motivator. Purgatory was a place of waiting, a time for penance before the final judgement, and during a soul's time in purgatory their penance and ultimate judgement could be

ameliorated by the prayers, Masses, and charity of their living loved ones. Charity performed during one's lifetime was still the most effective penance for sin, but the ability to help a loved one's soul in purgatory was a powerful motivator for the living.

Lay people became increasingly important participants in religious life throughout this period, through involvement in managing the affairs of the parish and through membership of religious guilds. The religious education of lay people and their levels of literacy also increased throughout the period, mainly through the education policy of the Church and the importance of understanding in the process of confession, penance, and satisfaction every Lent. Most people were immersed in religious culture that emphasised the perils of sin and presented the works of spiritual and bodily mercy as a cure-all. Even secular culture was infused with religious ideals and a pious charitable life was portrayed as the pinnacle of achievement.

The response to poverty was primarily the responsibility of the Church; poor relief at the parish level was supplemented by the alms and casual giving of the laity, to family, friends, and neighbours and to strangers as representatives of Christ. Religious charitable institutions such as monasteries, hospitals, almshouses and *leprosaria* also played a supplementary role in the support of the poor. The Black Death was the catalyst for change and the internal migration resulting from the search for better wages was the trigger for greater intervention by the State. Charity for the local worthy poor became formalised, bureaucratised, and eventually enforced by the implementation of a local poor tax. Despite all this, the concept of charity continued to have a deep resonance for the laity and individuals attempted to take control of their own piety through the provision of charity, including the establishment of charitable institutions such as almshouses.

Medieval charity was a complex and sophisticated concept, one that was fundamental to medieval life and had the potential to be practised by people at all social and economic levels. Almshouses were the embodiment of this sophistication. The next chapter looks at the founders of almshouses in the City of London and Westminster and examines the similarities and differences between them.

## Chapter Three: Almshouse Founders

... dedes of mercy and pite<sup>1</sup>

Chapter Two investigated the factors relating to lay piety, poverty and charity that underpinned the development of almshouses in London. This chapter will examine the almshouses of the City of London and Westminster between 1330 and 1600: who founded them, where they were built and the different factors that motivated their founders, including piety, relief of poverty, mortality experience, political environment, and social and religious issues. As discussed in Chapter One, previous scholars have suggested a series of potential factors that may have influenced the foundation of almshouses: Rotha Mary Clay suggested that the stimulus for the evolution of almshouses was the Reformation;<sup>2</sup> Orme and Webster focussed attention on the gradual evolution of medieval hospitals into almshouses over a prolonged period of time;<sup>3</sup> and Elaine Phillips proposed that the Black Death was a greater catalyst for change and that almshouses were born out of an increasing disposition among lay people to reform charitable institutions and exercise control over their own spiritual and temporal affairs.<sup>4</sup> Others, for example Goose and Looijestijn, have emphasised that mortality experience, especially the death of children, was a prime motivator for the foundation of almshouses.<sup>5</sup> Frank Rexroth suggested that almshouse foundation in the City of London was a result of civic leaders' desire to control deviant behaviour by demanding that people complied with social norms to be eligible for admission to almshouses.<sup>6</sup> Angela Nicholls' work on almshouses in early-modern England identified several possible motivators for the foundation of almshouses, including: 'philanthropy in response to social need', the availability of disposable wealth, obligation to servants and tenants, patronage, memorialisation, the desire to establish a culture of good governance and social stability, piety and the promotion of a particular religious

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<sup>1</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 109.

<sup>2</sup> Clay, *Medieval Hospitals*, p. xix; Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, p. 114.

<sup>3</sup> Orme and Webster, *The English Hospital*, pp. 136-138.

<sup>4</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', pp. 132, 293.

<sup>5</sup> Henk Looijestijn, 'Funding and founding private Charities', p. 207; Goose and Looijestijn, 'Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic', pp. 1049-1073.

<sup>6</sup> Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 255.

identity.<sup>7</sup>

Except for the Reformation, mortality experience and the control of deviant behaviour (which I will argue had a limited effect), all these factors appear to play a role in the foundation of late-medieval and Tudor almshouses in London and Westminster.

However, they are not universal in their application. I will argue that factors relating to the foundation of almshouses are complex and can be divided into five key areas.

Firstly, that rather than evolving from older, decaying medieval hospitals, the vast majority of almshouses in London and Westminster were new institutions. Secondly that the almshouses were born out of frustration at the mismanagement of hospitals and the apparent impotence of ecclesiastical and political authorities to resolve these issues. Thirdly, that almshouse foundation demonstrated founders' sophisticated knowledge of spiritual matters and a desire to take control of their own relationship with God. Fourthly, that the almshouses were an intelligent response to the founders' experience of poverty among communities that were meaningful to them. And finally, that the almshouses were an expression of the founders' perceptions of and aspirations for their position within the body politic and their duty within that role.

### 3.1 Chronology

I have found a total of fifty-two almshouses associated with the City of London and Westminster between 1330 and 1600 (see figures 3.1 and 3.2 below, these maps are repeated here to aid understanding of the chronology of almshouse foundation). Of these, forty-one were founded in or adjacent to the City of London, two of unknown location in the City of London and nine in Westminster. The maps demonstrate the development of almshouses over time in fifty-year increments, starting with Elsyngspital (number 1 on figure 3.1) and ending with Lady Dacre's Almshouse (number 52 on figure 3.2). Both maps show the development of almshouses mostly within the City walls, or parish boundary for Westminster, until 1500 when development began to spread to the urban areas outside, though almshouses continued to be built in the heart of the urban area throughout the timescale of this study.<sup>8</sup>

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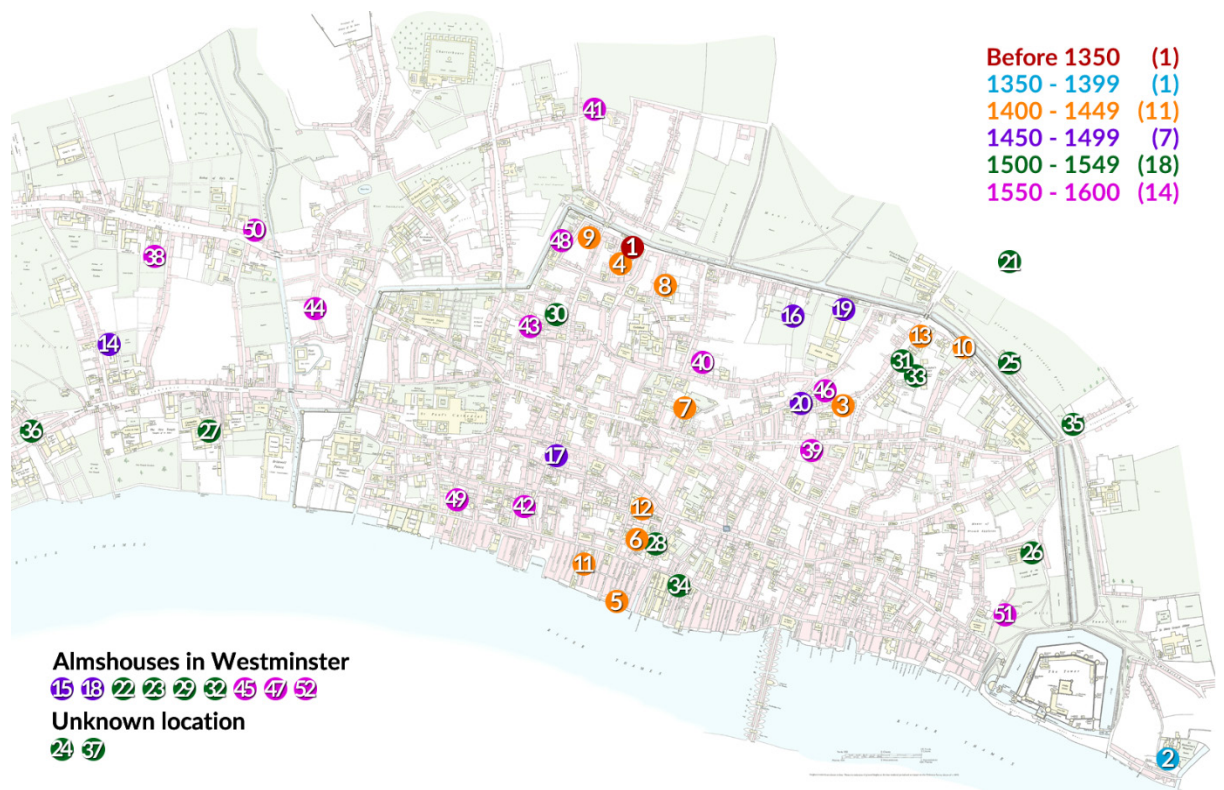
<sup>7</sup> Angela Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England: Charitable Housing in the Mixed Economy of Welfare 1550-1725* (Woodbridge, 2017), p. 89.

<sup>8</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 235-9, for further discussion of the topographical distribution of almshouses.



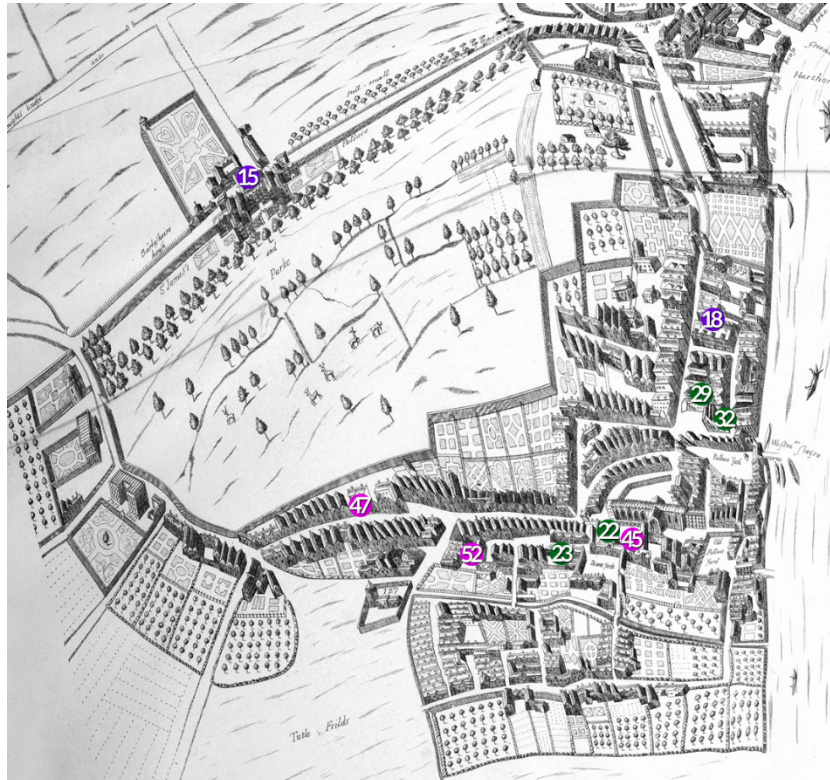
**Figure 3.1 Map of Almshouses in the City of London 1330-1600**

*A Map of Tudor London 1520, British Historic Towns Atlas*



**Figure 3.2 Map of Almshouses in Westminster 1330-1600**

*W. Faithorne and R. Newcourt Map 1658 LMA*

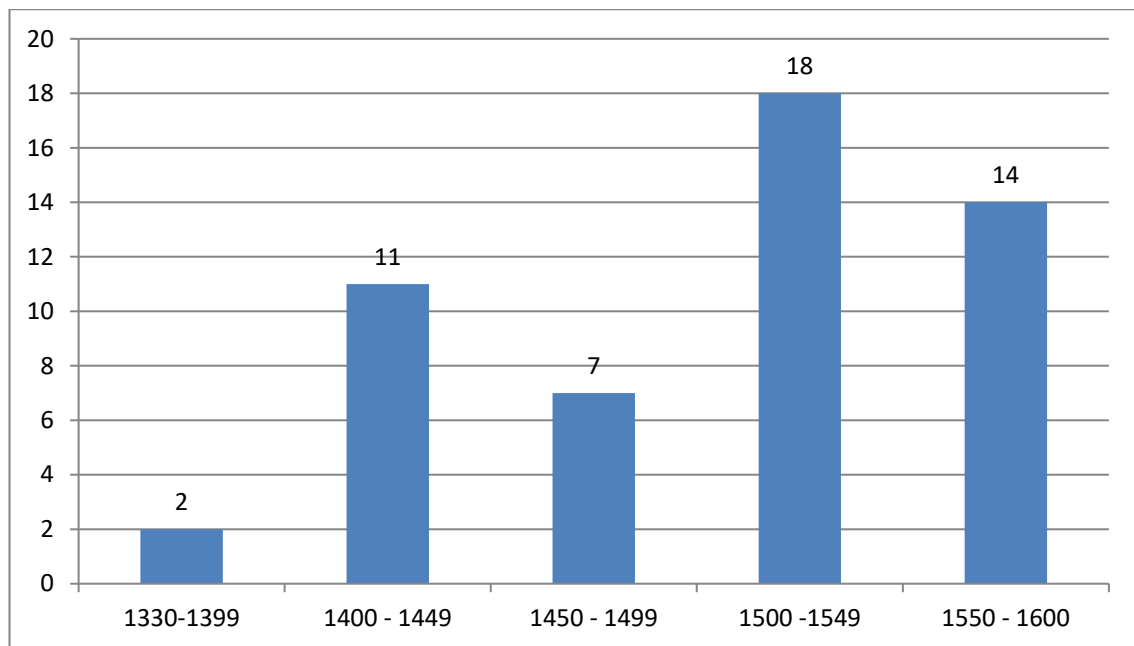


*Index of Almshouses in the City of London and Westminster: in foundation date order*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Elsyngspital                                   | 27. Countess of Kent's Almshouse (Clothworkers')             |
| 2. St Katharine's Hospital                        | 28. Jesus Commons  |
| 3. Merchant Taylors' Almshouse                    | 29. St Stephen's Westminster                                 |
| 4. Brewers' Almshouse                             | 30. Haberdashers' Almshouse                                  |
| 5. Whittington's Longhouse                        | 31. Andrew Judd's Almshouse (Skinners')                      |
| 6. Whittington's Almshouse                        | 32. Henry VIII's Almshouse (Watermens')                      |
| 7. Knolles' Almshouse (Grocers')                  | 33. John Hasilwood's Almshouse (Leathersellers')             |
| 8. Girdlers' Almshouse                            | 34. Robert Tyrwhitt's Almshouse (Dyers')                     |
| 9. Henry Barton's Almshouse (Skinners')           | 35. Anne Wether's Almshouse                                  |
| 10. St Augustine Papey                            | 36. St Clement Dane's Almshouse                              |
| 11. Vintners' Almshouse                           | 37. Kensington Parish Almshouse                              |
| 12. Cutlers' Almshouse                            | 38. Henry West's Almshouse (Dyers')                          |
| 13. Parish Clerks' Almshouse                      | 39. St Michael Cornhill Almshouse                            |
| 14. Domus Conversorum                             | 40. Dame Elizabeth Mory's Almshouse (Armourers')             |
| 15. St James' Westminster                         | 41. Lady Askew's Almshouse (Drapers')                        |
| 16. Carpenters' Almshouse                         | 42. Lewin's Almshouse (Ironmongers')                         |
| 17. Thomas Beaumont's Almshouse (Salters')        | 43. Sir Martin Bowes' Almshouse (Goldsmiths')                |
| 18. Guild of Our Lady of the Assumption Almshouse | 44. John Richmond's Almshouse (Armourers')                   |
| 19. Thomas Cook's Almshouse                       | 45. Westminster School Almshouse                             |
| 20. St Anthony of Vienne                          | 46. Sir Thomas Gresham's Almshouse (Mercers'/City of London) |
| 21. St Mary Spital without Bishopsgate Almshouse  | 47. Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouse                            |
| 22. Henry VII's Almshouse                         | 48. Sir Ambrose Nicholas' Almshouse (Salters')               |
| 23. Lady Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse            | 49. David Smith's Almshouse (Embroiderers')                  |
| 24. Kneseworth's Almshouse (Fishmongers')         | 50. Galliard Almshouse                                       |
| 25. Holy Trinity Almshouse                        | 51. Richard Hill's Almshouse (Merchant Taylor Hills)         |
| 26. Milbourne's Almshouse (Drapers')              | 52. Emmanuel Hospital (Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse)          |

The construction of almshouses in London and Westminster started in 1330 before the outbreak of the Black Death with the foundation of Elsyngspital by William Elsyng, a mercer from the City of London. Two almshouses were founded during the fourteenth century, eighteen during the fifteenth and thirty-two during the sixteenth century, with a small dip in the rate of foundation immediately following the dissolution of chantries in 1548 (see figure 3.3 below). As mentioned above, previous scholars have theorised that either the Black Death or the Dissolution of the Monasteries and Reformation of the Church of England was the catalyst for the development of the almshouse institution, but the Dissolution and Reformation, whilst temporarily slowing the pattern of almshouse foundation, did not mark its genesis and at least one almshouse (and possibly three – see dating issues below) was operational in London and Westminster before the Black Death first arrived in 1348, so it would appear that other factors may have had a causal role in their development.

Figure 3.3: Number of Almshouse foundations in the City of London and Westminster



Dating the foundation of many of these institutions has proved to be one of the biggest problems. Some almshouses are relatively easy to date. Richard Whittington's bequest to form a college and almshouse combined with John Carpenter's diligent record-keeping means that we can be reasonably sure that his almshouse was founded in 1424. Likewise, the Merchant Taylors' archives are clear that their almshouse was built in 1413. The date is also known for Henry VII's almshouse. However, for most of the other almshouses I have found, the foundation date is obscure. There are several reasons for this; the first is related to the problem of definition. St. James' Westminster started out as a leprosy hospital and gradually evolved into an almshouse. Other institutions, like St. Anthony of Vienne, St. Katharine's Hospital and the Westminster Almonry, built almshouses in addition to their hospital provision. Because records are sparse, determining precisely when these institutions either became an almshouse or built an additional almshouse is difficult.

The second reason for problems with dating relates to the documentary evidence. Jean Imray's work, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, discussed the deathbed foundation of Whittington's almshouse, which might imply that post-mortem foundations would be common. However, this form of almshouse foundation was not typical. Even Richard Whittington founded his first almshouse during his lifetime

(Whittington's Longhouse).<sup>9</sup> Only four other founders, Thomas Kneseworth, John Richmond, Henry Barton and Andrew Hunt (Girdlers' Almshouse) left bequests that appear to found an almshouse (though both Barton's and Kneseworth's almshouses may have been in existence already). Lifetime works of charity were considered superior to deathbed bequests during the late-medieval period and perhaps this trend demonstrates the levels of piety among almshouse founders, of which more later.<sup>10</sup> The majority of almshouses in London and Westminster appear to have been founded and run by private lay individuals during their lifetime and then transferred to an organisation such as a City company, also usually during their lifetimes. Only twelve of the almshouses in this study have surviving ordinances, foundation documents, indentures, or detailed directions for their administration, and, where they exist, these help enormously with establishing a foundation date.<sup>11</sup> But for the vast majority of almshouses the first documentary evidence that they exist appears when they are transferred to the management of another person or organisation, which can be several years, if not decades, after their actual foundation.

Establishing an end date for a foundation is equally difficult. Almshouse foundations experienced two big extinction events: The Chantries Acts of 1545 and 1547, and the Great Fire of London in 1666. Institutions that survived the Great Fire of London tended to be rebuilt outside of the city and during the following centuries they have often been moved, rebuilt, and combined with other foundations.

Almshouses in London and Westminster between 1330 and 1600 can be divided into four broad categories:

1. Royal foundations
2. Religious foundations
3. Lay foundations
4. Company foundations

There were six royal foundations (including that of Margaret Beaufort, the mother of Henry VII) founded between 1330 and 1600 in London and Westminster. The last was

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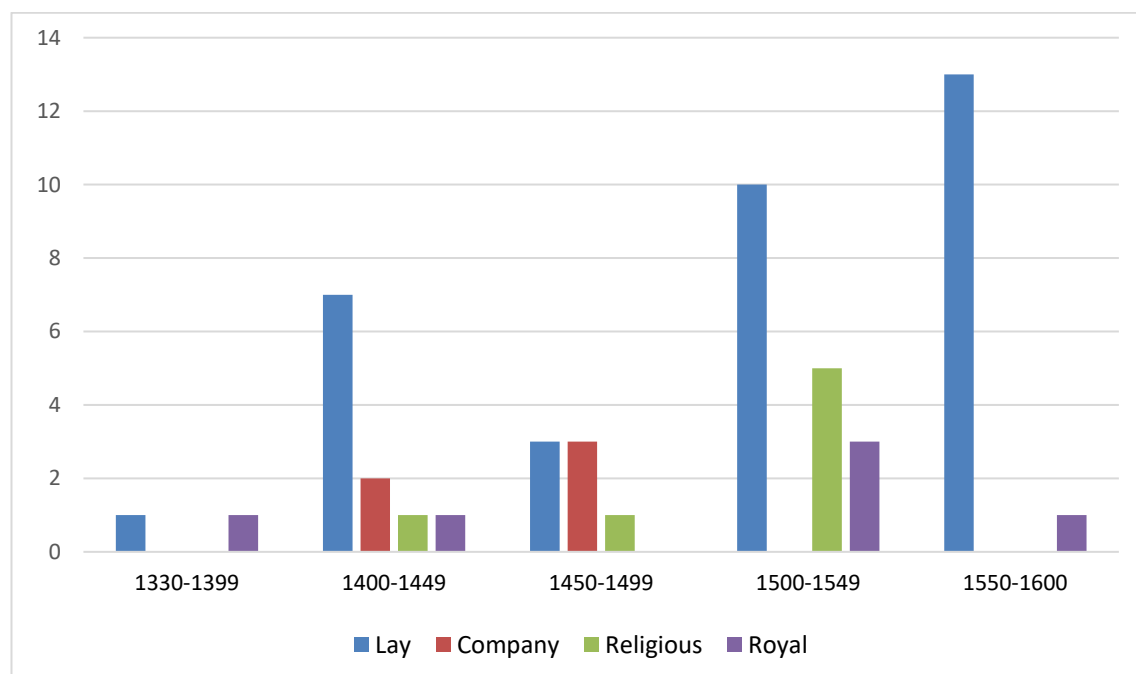
<sup>9</sup> See Appendix One, p. 321.

<sup>10</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', pp. 3-5. Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 86.

<sup>11</sup> See Chapter One p. 31. for information about the almshouses with some form of surviving ordinances, indentures, foundation charters or other directions.

Westminster Almshouse founded by Elizabeth I in 1560. The eight religious foundations were established by a member of the clergy, the parish, or a fraternity. These were often operated within the administrative wing of a wider religious institution, such as Westminster Abbey. No new almshouses were founded in this category after the Dissolution. The largest category was of lay founders, with thirty-one almshouses founded between 1330 and 1600 in London and Westminster. The first institution that can arguably be called an almshouse in London and Westminster, Elsyngspital, was founded by a lay person in 1330. Lay foundations continued throughout the period studied, apart from a small decrease in the second half of the fifteenth century, until by the second half of the sixteenth century the majority of new almshouses in London and Westminster were founded by lay people (see figure 3.4 below). Company almshouses were institutions that were founded corporately by a City company (rather than being managed by a company after being founded by a layperson). These foundations started in the early fifteenth century and then gradually diminished by the Dissolution. A total of five company almshouses were founded during the study period.

*Figure 3.4: Almshouse founders by category 1330-1600*



Despite the disruptive intervention of the Dissolution, the number of almshouse foundations increased steadily over the time-frame of this study. Why should this be

so? What motivated the founders to invest so heavily in a charitable institution like an almshouse? The answer to these questions is complex and multi-layered and includes factors relating to piety and charity, poverty and population growth, political issues, wealth and social influence and mortality experience. We will look at each of these areas in turn.

### 3.2 Influences

As we have seen, one popular theory was that almshouses evolved from old, decaying medieval hospitals and *leprosaria*.<sup>12</sup> Phillips found that leprosy hospitals in East Anglia underwent change after the Black Death and abandoned their old function.<sup>13</sup>

However, only one institution out of fifty-two almshouses found in this study in London and Westminster followed that route, and the changes appear to have happened well before the Black Death in 1348. St. James' Westminster was originally founded as a leper hospital. By 1319 the residents were no longer leprous, and in 1331 Master John de Sydenham renovated the hospital and installed partitions in the dormitory to make individual rooms. In 1449 the hospital was given to Eton College at which point there were four almswomen resident. The hospital was forfeited back to the King in 1460, and, when the hospital was converted into a palace by Henry VIII in 1530, the almswomen were allowed to stay until 1536. It is difficult to say when this hospital became an almshouse. Was it in 1331 when partitions were built in the dormitory? Partition building demonstrates that the institution decided to provide individual accommodation for the residents, one of the key characteristics of an almshouse (and *leprosaria* when they began to admit fee-paying corrodians).<sup>14</sup> It is rare to find datable evidence of this transition and fascinating that it took place so early, well before the Black Death, and contemporaneous with the foundation of Elsyngspital, the first institution that could be considered an almshouse in the City of London. The evolution of St. James' Hospital from Leper Hospital to almshouse seems

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<sup>12</sup> Orme and Webster, *The English Hospital*, pp. 136-138.

<sup>13</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', pp. 119, 120.

<sup>14</sup> A visitation report of St Giles' hospital Beverly (1281) ordered the removal of secret, or suspect cells in the infirmary. W. Brown ed., *The Register of William Wickwane, Lord Archbishop Of York, 1279-1285* Surtees Society 115 (Durham, 1907), p. 138.

to have been completed by 1449 when the residents were described in the records as 'alms sisters'.<sup>15</sup>

None of the other older medieval hospitals in London evolved into almshouses in this manner, although some built almshouses in addition to their single hall hospital provision. St. Katharine's Hospital, for example, was initially founded by Queen Matilda in 1147 for thirteen 'poor souls'.<sup>16</sup> The hospital was a classic single hall with attached chapel. The hospital was then re-founded by Queen Eleanor who granted it a new Charter in 1273 for three priest brothers, six poor scholars and eighteen poor lay brothers and sisters.<sup>17</sup> The hospital still accepted pilgrims and the sick overnight in the hospital church, as there are continuing snippets of evidence to this effect, but they are not mentioned in Queen Eleanor's statutes. In 1354, a few years after the Black Death, Queen Philippa oversaw the rebuilding of St. Katharine's hospital, which included a new church with a large nave, collegiate accommodation for the priests, scholars and lay brothers, lay sisters and the poor 'Bede's women'.<sup>18</sup> It appears to be at this point that accommodation for the poor women and the lay sisters was built in the form of an almshouse. So, by 1354 St. Katharine's Hospital included a hospital, a college of priests, a choir school and an almshouse. Other traditional medieval hospitals, such as St. Mary Bishopsgate and St Anthony of Vienne, also added an almshouse as a new charitable activity to their already extensive range. Therefore, almshouses in London and Westminster were not usually born from the decay of the older medieval hospitals; instead, they tended to be an active policy development. Indeed, several of the old medieval hospitals in the City of London, including St. Mary Bethlem and St. Bartholomew's, did not build almshouses and remained functioning as traditional hospitals.

In other parts of the country, it was common for *leprosaria* to evolve into almshouses, as the numbers of people with leprosy declined after the twelfth century. Carole Rawcliffe described several possible paths for old leprosy hospitals, including becoming

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<sup>15</sup> Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, p. 309.

<sup>16</sup> Andrew Coltee Ducarel, *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica. No V. Containing the History of the Royal Hospital and Collegiate Church of St. Katharine, near the Tower of London* (London, 1782), p. 31.

<sup>17</sup> Ducarel, *History of St. Katharine's*, p. 35; Catherine Jamison, *The History of the Royal Hospital of St. Katharine* (London, 1952) p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Ducarel, *History of St. Katharine's*, p. 68.

almshouses, shutting down, and being used as isolation hospitals.<sup>19</sup> Marjorie Honeybourne found ten *leprosaria* outside the walls of the City of London (St James' Hospital Westminster, Hammersmith Hospital, St. Anthony Highgate, St. Giles-in-the-fields Holborn, Kingsland Hackney, the Lock Southwark, Mile End, Rotherhithe, Enfield, and Knightsbridge Hospitals). Apart from St James Westminster, which became an almshouse, they were placed under the care of St. Bartholomew's Hospital after the Dissolution and eventually became 'poor houses' or 'out houses' for the hospital.<sup>20</sup> However, apart from St James Westminster, these old leprosy hospitals of London do not appear to have become almshouses.

Almshouse foundations were flexible, they overlapped with at least four different forms of charitable institution in London and Westminster. We have already discussed the link between leprosy hospitals and what are described as 'Poor Houses', which we will discuss in more detail later. There are also links between almshouses and other institutions (see figure 3.5 below). Colleges overlap with almshouses to the extent that it can sometimes be hard to distinguish one from another. Whittington's Almshouse and College had a remarkably close connection; they were built next door to each other. Whittington's College housed retired priests and a choir school and the almshouse was for the worthy poor of the Mercers' Company. According to the almshouse statutes the institutions had charitable obligations to each other – they shared meals, the priests provided the services and sang and visited the almsfolk, and the almspeople looked after the priests if they were sick. Almshouse and College also followed a similar rule of life, following the Augustinian rule.<sup>21</sup> Additionally, the early almshouses sometimes showed a preference for literate residents, or those who had memorised prayers and psalms and could assist priests with religious services.<sup>22</sup> Some almshouses, such as Jesus Commons and St. Augustine Papey, had elements of both institutions.<sup>23</sup> The symbiotic charitable obligations, between Whittington's College of Priests and Almshouse, and other institutions with their almshouses, such as

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<sup>19</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 321.

<sup>20</sup> Marjorie B. Honeybourne, 'The Leper Hospitals of the London Area', *London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 21 (1967), pp. 1-61.

<sup>21</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 32.

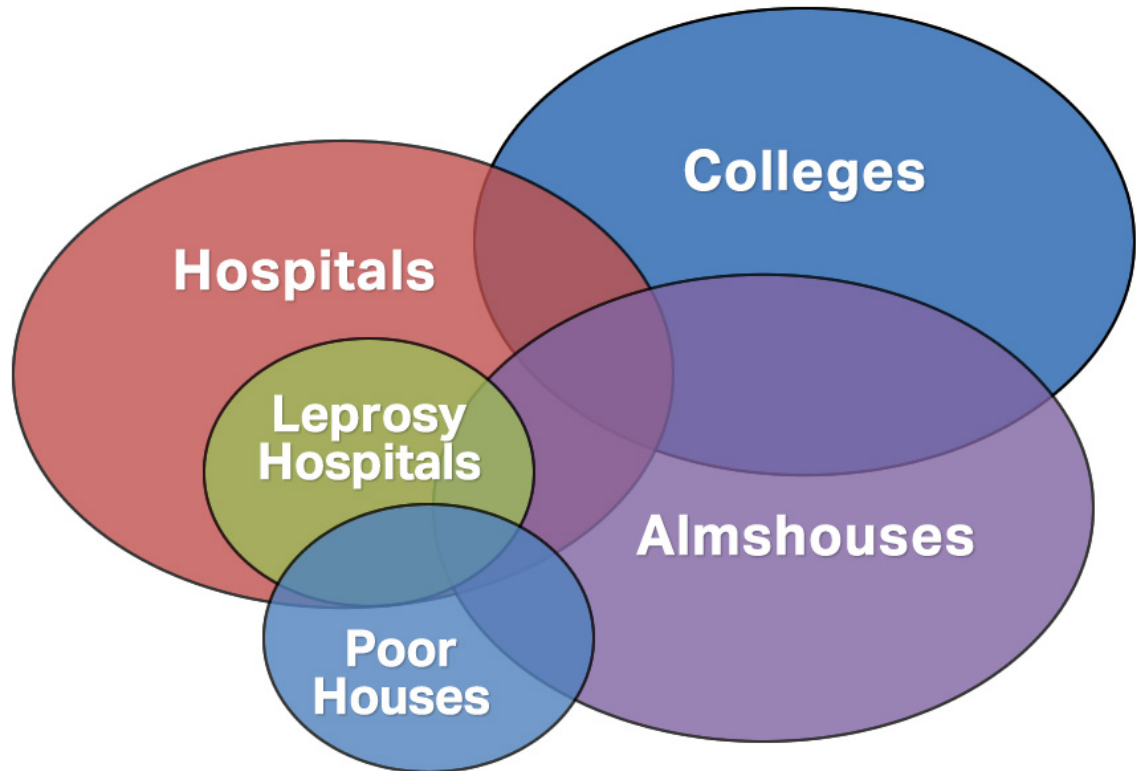
<sup>22</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 198-204.

<sup>23</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 303, 312.



Westminster Abbey, St Katharine's Hospital, St Mary Bishopsgate and St Anthony of Vienne, are symptomatic of their shared foundational concepts of piety and charity.

*Figure 3.5: Relationship between almshouses and other charitable institutions*



Like the foundation of the older traditional medieval hospitals, the foundation of an almshouse constituted an act of charitable devotion on the part of the founders as demonstrated by the surviving foundation documents and wills. The concepts of charity in the practice of the works of mercy, the virtue of poverty, and the salvation of souls were central to the foundation of almshouses. These concepts were embedded in the foundation documents of Richard Whittington's Almshouse (1424) and were portrayed as guaranteeing his eternal salvation.<sup>24</sup> As we have seen, in the medieval period charity was considered a multifaceted concept embodied by the seven works of bodily and spiritual mercy.<sup>25</sup> However, the understanding and mediation of these concepts was supposed to be restricted to the role of the priest. There was suspicion of lay people who theorised about spiritual matters outside the priesthood in the fifteenth century, which, combined with the risk of being accused of heresy, could

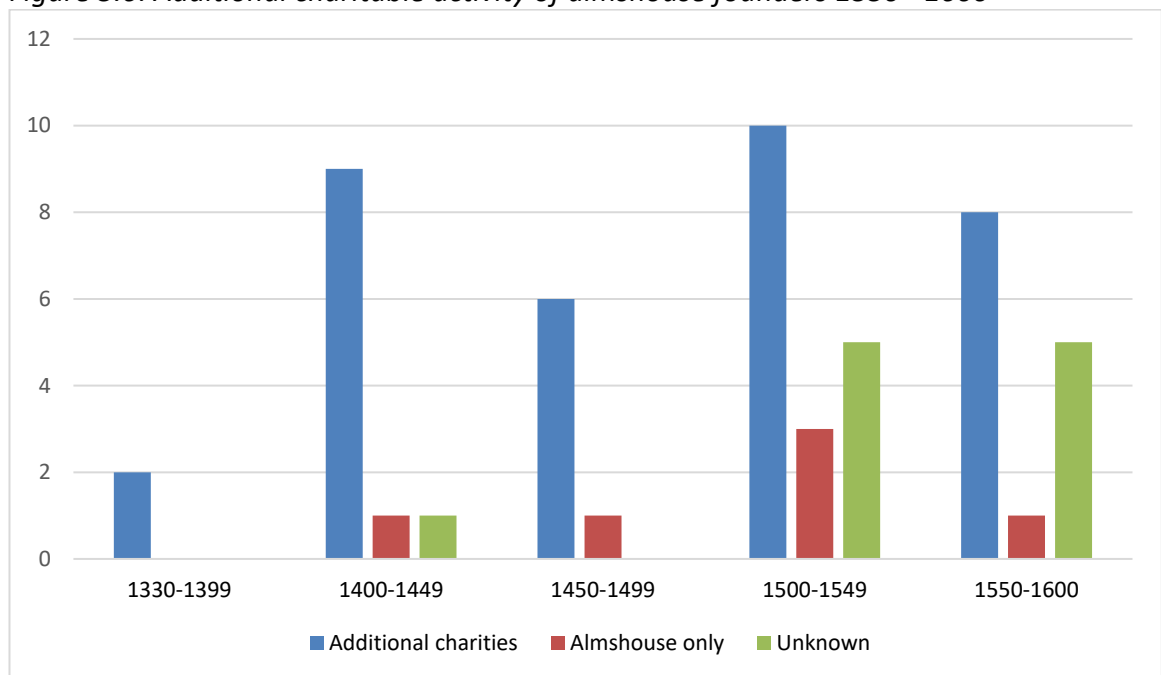
<sup>24</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 109; also See Chapter Two, pp. 52-68, on charity and fraternities.

<sup>25</sup> Brodman, *Charity and Religion*, p. 26.

have life-limiting consequences.<sup>26</sup> Sheila Lindenbaum theorised that this climate of theological suppression encouraged literate and educated lay Londoners to conceal their knowledge of theological issues and demonstrate them in other, more acceptable ways, such as enhanced parish ritual and engagement in works of charity.<sup>27</sup>

Because the concepts of charity and mercy were so central to the medieval understanding of Christianity, acts of charity are useful measures of the piety of the wealthy, or at least a measure of the piety the individual wanted to appear to possess.<sup>28</sup> However, almshouses were rarely founded in isolation, rather they were just one part of a charitable package. In fact, the number of almshouse founders of all types, who founded multiple charitable activities associated with their almshouses, far outweighs those almshouse founders who only founded a ‘stand-alone’ almshouse institution, even considering the eleven almshouse founders for whom this information is not available (see figure 3.6 below).<sup>29</sup>

*Figure 3.6: Additional charitable activity of almshouse founders 1330 - 1600*



<sup>26</sup> Nicholas Watson, ‘Censorship and Cultural Change in Late Medieval England: Vernacular Theology, The Oxford Translation Debate, and Arundel’s Constitutions of 1409’, *Speculum*, 70 (1992), pp. 822-64.

<sup>27</sup> Lindenbaum, ‘Literate Londoners and Liturgical Change’, pp. 384, 386.

<sup>28</sup> Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 183.

<sup>29</sup> This examination of the additional charitable foundations of almshouse founders is limited to the charitable activities that were associated with the foundation of an almshouse. Many almshouse founders were associated with other charitable projects outside of their almshouse foundation.

The information regarding the charitable scope of foundations that include almshouses comes from multiple sources. Charters are particularly valuable where they exist but there are only three relating to almshouses in the City of London and Westminster during this period. Some almshouse foundations were developed by a City Company from a monetary bequest. For example, John Churchman's bequest to the Merchant Taylors that enabled them to buy land on which to build their almshouse stipulated that the Taylors were to administer various charitable bequests including a chantry for his soul at St Martin Outwich.<sup>30</sup> Wills can also be a source of information about charitable activity associated with almshouse foundation, but this source is limited as almshouses were usually founded before death and therefore not necessarily included in testamentary bequests. However, eleven wills of almshouse founders make some comment about these matters. Henry Barton's will described the elaborate chantry and charitable activities associated with his almshouse.<sup>31</sup>

The growth in numbers of multiple charitable foundations mapped the increase in almshouse foundation across the period, demonstrating that this trend was not stopped by the dissolution of the monasteries and the abolition of the chantries in the mid-sixteenth century. Apart from an increase in undifferentiated charitable foundations after the Dissolution, (foundations where additional charitable activity is unknown) understandable given the ruthlessness with which chantries were being closed - almshouse foundation as part of a wider charitable activity continued. Some almshouse foundations were singular and not apparently part of a wider charitable activity on the part of the founders, but these remain consistently less than two every fifty years between 1330 and 1600, despite the increase in almshouse foundation overall.

The types of charitable activities supported by almshouse founders were broad and can be divided into six groups: spiritual charity, including funding priests' chantries and the provision of prayer and Masses; education, including choir schools, grammar schools and colleges; relief for prisoners; marriage portions for young girls; general

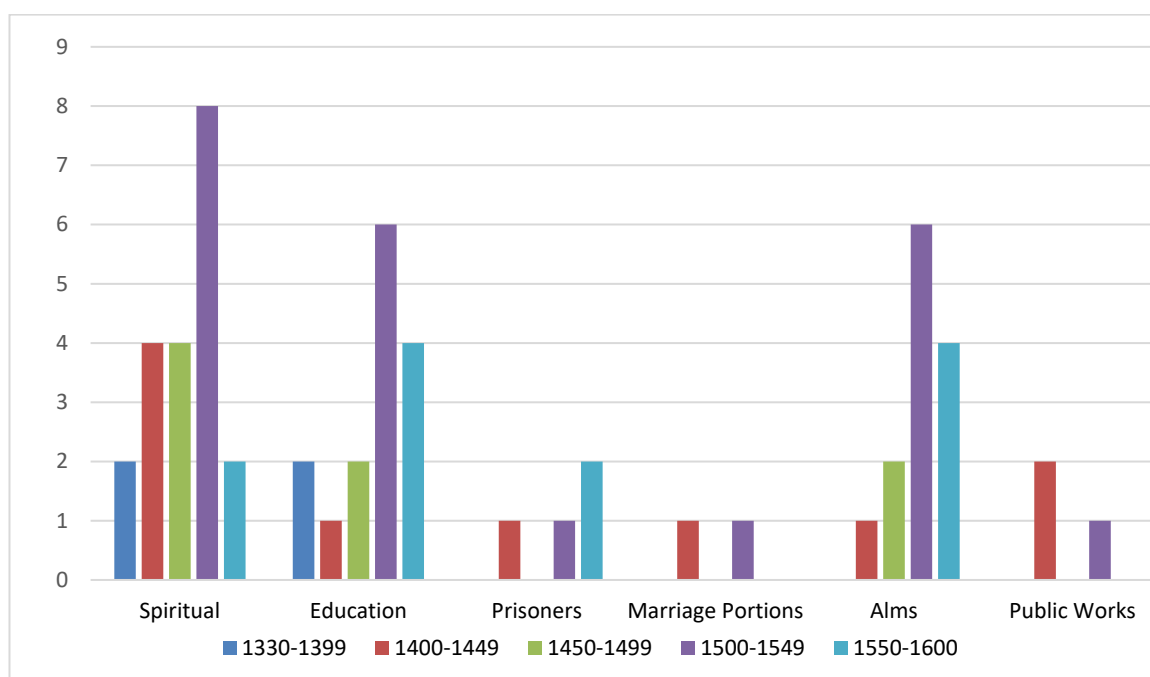
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<sup>30</sup> M. P. Davies, 'The Tailors of London and their Guild, c 1300-1500' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1994), p. 54

<sup>31</sup> TNA PROB 11/3/353

alms for the poor; and public works, such as bridge building, road improvement and water supply (see figure 3.7 below). The most popular type of charitable activity between 1330 and 1600 was spiritual charity, which shows the fundamental importance of the spiritual works of mercy for almshouse founders. The second most frequent charitable activity was education. Providing alms for the poor, which Jordan found the most popular charitable endowment in England, was a close third.<sup>32</sup>

*Figure 3.7: Types of additional charitable activity by almshouse founder 1330 -1600*



If we then examine the additional charitable activities of almshouse founders across the period (see figure 3.7 above), it becomes apparent that the focus of almshouse founders' charitable activities changed over time. Charitable giving to both public works and marriage portions was only occasionally provided for with almshouse building, whereas prisoners receive funding for most of the period but only at a low level. Of these three forms of charitable activity only support for prisoners appears among the works of mercy and this may be key to understanding why other forms of charitable giving decreased among almshouse founders during the period. While public works, such as bridge building, water conduits and public lavatories, have a clear benefit to the body politic, they are not accounted for in the works of mercy. Caroline Barron noted that the provision of these amenities remained dependent on the charity

<sup>32</sup> Jordan, *Philanthropy in England*, p. 369.

of private individuals and companies throughout the late-medieval period, so the need for public works had not decreased and yet they were less popular with the majority of almshouse founders.<sup>33</sup> Marriage portions also do not feature in biblical texts, although they are a specialised form of almsgiving. It may be that these were local traditional charitable activities that became less popular during this period among almshouse founders as theological education improved amongst the laity through literacy and catechism.

The funding for spiritual charity apparently declined after the Dissolution. Theoretically the Reformation brought a fundamental challenge to the almshouses: sweeping away intercession for the dead, indulgencies, purgatory, and justification of the soul by works of mercy. That the almshouses were able to survive this upheaval is a testament to their intense practicality and adaptability. The Countess of Kent's Almshouse was transferred to the Clothworkers' Company during the immediate aftermath of the Dissolution. The indentures of the Countess of Kent's Almshouse prudently took into consideration the fact that Whitefriars Monastery, the proposed site of the Countess's tomb, might be suppressed and proposed an alternative site for her obit in that case, though she did not envisage the possibility that obits themselves could be banned.<sup>34</sup>

Henry VIII may have calmed fears about the legitimacy of almshouses in post-Dissolution England by founding an almshouse for the Watermen at the Woolstaple in 1544.<sup>35</sup> The two almshouse foundations post-1550, that expressly included intercession for the dead, were established by Sir Martin Bowes and Thomas Lewin during the reign of Mary I when there was a brief return to Catholicism.<sup>36</sup> Martin Bowes provided for a traditional pre-Dissolution chantry and obit.<sup>37</sup> Thomas Lewin gave funds to re-establish the order of Friars Observant and rebuild their monastery in addition to his almshouse, chantry and obit.<sup>38</sup> However, even after Protestantism had been re-established under Elizabeth I, Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse (Emmanuel

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<sup>33</sup> One notable exception to this was Richard Whittington who built one of his almshouses over a public lavatory, see Appendix One, p. 321. Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 266.

<sup>34</sup> CCA, London CL/G/MSS/Angell/5/21/23.

<sup>35</sup> Humpherus, *History of the Company of Watermen and Lightermen*, p. 89.

<sup>36</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 317, 308.

<sup>37</sup> *Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting* II, pp. 670-671.

<sup>38</sup> *Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting* II, pp. 668.

Hospital), founded in 1595, required residents to follow a rule of life that was broadly comparable to the quasi-Augustinian rule of almshouses nearly 175 years earlier. This included daily labour and daily prayers and the requirement to show charity to one another and care for each other when sick.<sup>39</sup> It also catered for the care and education of orphans. Generally, the foundations continued to provide a broad spectrum of charitable activities, that included education and almsgiving and a requirement to attend religious services and perform the spiritual works of mercy, but this was expressed in a form that was more acceptable to the new religious ideals and did not include a requirement to pray for the founder's soul.

It is clear that piety and charity, particularly regarding the spiritual works of mercy, continued to be a central pillar of almshouse foundations across the period 1330 – 1600, and, despite the religious turmoil of the sixteenth century, they remained committed to their original pious and charitable ideals. Far from being isolated monuments to a founder's ideals of piety and charity, almshouses were just one constituent of a mixed charitable enterprise that sought to encompass all the works of mercy, spiritual and bodily. Almshouse founders were pious and educated people, who took their Christian duty to be charitable very seriously, a practice that was not effectively deflected by the Dissolution of the Monasteries and Chantries or the Reformation.

It has been argued that almshouses were built in response to grief, particularly the loss of children. In *The Anatomy of Melancholy* (1638), Robert Burton wrote:

...if he have no children, no neere kinsman, heire he cares for at least, or cannot well tell otherwise how or where to bestow his possessions (for carry them with him he cannot) it may bee then he will build some schoole or hospital! in his life, or bee induced to give liberally to pious uses after his death.<sup>40</sup>

In this passage Burton suggested that building a school or hospital might be effective for the relief of melancholy of those without children. Burton is not alone in making this suggestion. Both Nigel Goose and Henk Looijestijn, have proposed that the death

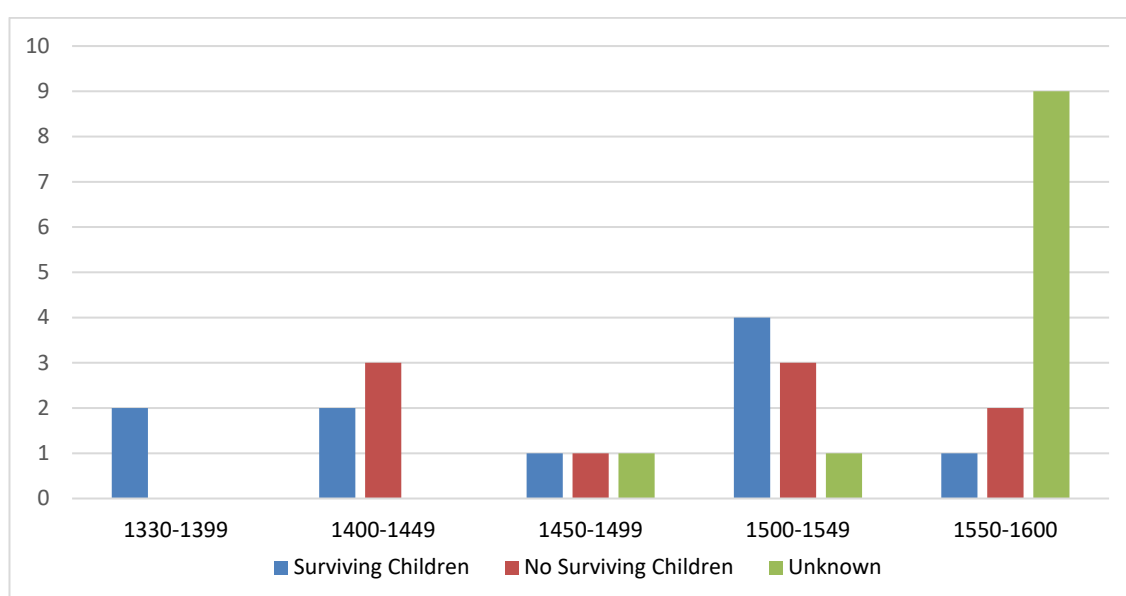
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<sup>39</sup> Charity Commission Report 31<sup>st</sup> May 1889, *Parochial Charities of Westminster* (London, 1890).

<sup>40</sup> Robert Burton, *The Anatomy of Melancholy What it Is, with All the Kinds, Causes, Symptomes, Prognostickes, and Seuerall Cures of it : in Three Partitions, with Their Severall Sections, Members & Subsections*, H. Cripps ed., (Oxford, 1638), p. 427.

of children was a prime motivator for the foundation of almshouses in Leiden from the fifteenth century onwards.<sup>41</sup> Henk Looijestijn's data on the Leiden almshouses suggested that 83% of almshouse founders in Leiden died childless compared to 69% in the Northern Netherlands. Leiden bears some comparison to London, as it was 'wealthy, highly urbanised and densely populated', but the time-frame of the Leiden study is different: 1450 - 1800.<sup>42</sup> Looijestijn asserted that, despite the presence of six founders who had healthy children, childlessness at the point of foundation was a 'crucial factor' in the creation of an almshouse.

*Figure 3.8: Lay Almshouse Founders with surviving children in London and Westminster*



However, the picture was quite different in London and Westminster (see figure 3.8 above). Almshouse founders were just as likely to have surviving children as not. I found that 30% of almshouse founders had no surviving offspring and 33% of founders had surviving children, with the remaining 37% unknown. Indeed, in the early sixteenth century lay almshouse founders were slightly more likely to have surviving children (three founders childless compared to four with children).<sup>43</sup> Only one of the almshouses in this study, Gresham's Almshouse founded in 1575, recorded grief at the

<sup>41</sup> Looijestijn, 'Funding and founding private Charities', p. 207; Goose and Looijestijn, 'Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic', pp. 1049-1073.

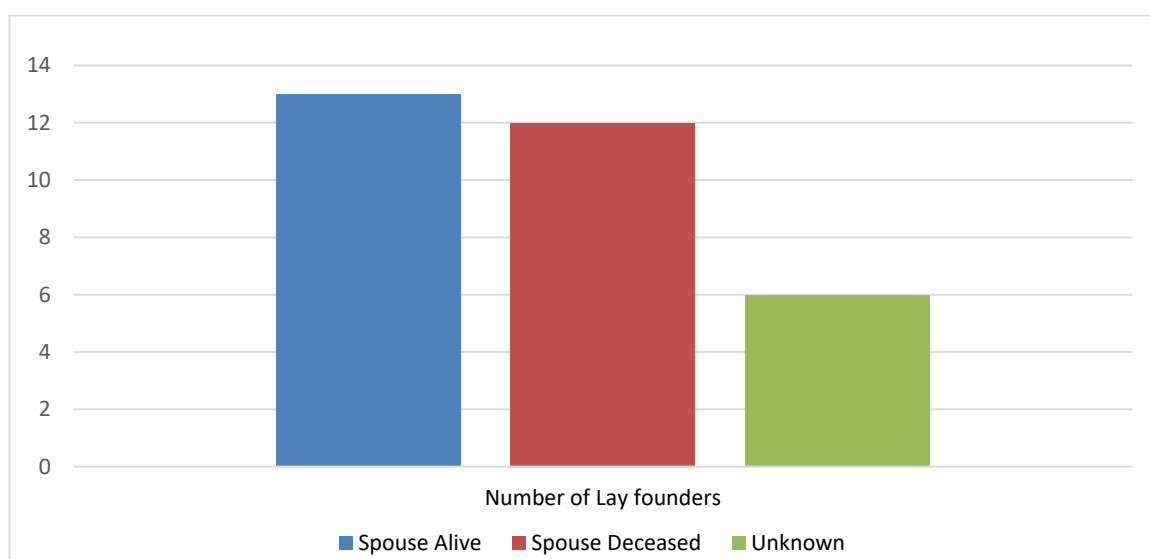
<sup>42</sup> Looijestijn, 'Funding and founding private Charities,' p. 201.

<sup>43</sup> Richard Whittington, who was childless, founded two almshouses in the City of London: Whittington's Almshouse and Whittington's Longhouse. See Appendix One p. 321.

death of a child (in this case Thomas Gresham's son), as a prime motivator for the establishment of several charitable foundations which included an almshouse.

The situation is also ambiguous regarding the mortality of spouses. Marginally more almshouse founders had surviving spouses (see figure 3.9 below). All the female lay founders were widows, but male lay founders were equally divided between widowers and those whose wives survived them. The spouse survival for six lay founders is unknown. More founders had living spouses in the post- Dissolution period of almshouse foundation, between 1550 and 1600, with increasing numbers of foundations, such as Emmanuel Hospital (Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse), being joint projects between husband and wife, occasionally completed, as in this case, after the death of a spouse.

*Figure 3.9: Mortality of Lay Almshouse Founder's Spouse 1330-1600*



Late medieval and Tudor London enforced the practice of *legitim* at this time, whereby a widow received a third of her husband's estate, her children also got a third and the final third was to be used for the good of the testator's soul.<sup>44</sup> This effectively limited the amount of capital an individual could leave for a charitable project like an almshouse. This may partly account for the joint almshouse projects between husband and wife, and why so few of the almshouse foundations in London and Westminster

<sup>44</sup> The practice of *legitim* continued in London until the seventeenth century. Richard Helmolz, 'Legitim in English Legal History', *University of Illinois Law Review* 659 (1984), p. 667. Barron, 'The 'Golden Age' of Women', p. 36.



were founded after death. Of the thirty-one lay almshouses found in this study only five were post-mortem foundations.

Given the pervasiveness of mortality experience, particularly relating to epidemics such as plague, during the late-medieval and Tudor period it was highly unlikely an almshouse founder would not have experienced the death of a loved one: spouse, child, family member or friend.<sup>45</sup> In London, between 1348 and 1530, the plague returned roughly every three and a half years and there does not seem to be a correlation between these events and the foundation of almshouses.<sup>46</sup>

Many founders were married and either had children or at least the potential to sire children when their almshouses were constructed. This finding is supported by Elaine Phillips's study of charity in East Anglia where almshouses were founded during the lifetime of the founder rather than post-mortem.<sup>47</sup> Therefore, I cannot say that either child or spouse mortality was a prime motivator; for most founders the motivation to build an almshouse seems to come from somewhere other than personal grief. If grief was not a prime motivator for the foundation of almshouses then perhaps the motivation came from the observation of local need.

As discussed in Chapter Two, current theories about poverty and population in the City of London between 1330 and 1600 would suggest that because of the mortality caused by the plague both population and poverty in the City of London and Westminster became less of a problem. The population of London plummeted at the end of the fourteenth century following the outbreak of Black Death.<sup>48</sup> There then followed repeated outbreaks of plague and other diseases, such as sweating sickness, which caused the deaths of two mayors and four aldermen in 1485 within the space of two months.<sup>49</sup> The population of London failed to recover until the end of the fifteenth century and as a consequence poverty and destitution appear to have lessened, and it is theorised that institutions were adequate to meet local needs.<sup>50</sup> Plague had long

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<sup>45</sup> Vanessa Harding, 'Families in later medieval London: sex, marriage and mortality', p. 26.

<sup>46</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 68, 360-375.

<sup>47</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 136.

<sup>48</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 44-45, for a more detailed discussion on the population of London during this period.

<sup>49</sup> Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 241.

<sup>50</sup> Harding, 'The Population of London, 1550-1700', pp. 111-12.

term consequences because of the fracturing of family networks. Demographic evidence suggests that working people married later, if at all, and consequently people had fewer children which resulted in a more nuclear family structure and fewer relatives to support family members in need. Vanessa Harding found that in the mid-sixteenth century less than half of all marriages in London resulted in surviving offspring.<sup>51</sup> The rise in standards of living due to increased wages meant that those who survived the epidemics were more likely to live to old age but with fewer relatives around to support them in their declining years.<sup>52</sup> Carole Rawcliffe has also suggested that elderly paupers posed a growing social problem in cities and towns from the later fourteenth century onwards.<sup>53</sup> Perhaps this group of people, invisible on the streets, but impoverished all the same and known within varying local community structures in London, such as parish or company, were a motivation for the almshouse founders. Indeed, Marjorie McIntosh has suggested that local people had a far greater role than the Church in responding to local need and that private charity was considered the foundation of poor support to be supplemented if necessary, by public aid.<sup>54</sup>

As we have seen historians have suggested that the Black Death was a catalyst for the development of almshouses (Phillips), or problems with the workforce causing civic leaders to want to control the deviant poor by providing help for the respectable 'shamefaced' poor (Rexroth), or 'philanthropy in response to local need' (Nicholls).<sup>55</sup> The evidence available in the City of London and Westminster tends to be more supportive of Nicholls's and Phillips's theory rather than that of Rexroth.

Many types of almshouses were established in London for many different groups of people, but one distinct group of almshouses was dedicated to the relief of the parish poor.<sup>56</sup> These small, often poor, local establishments, have all but disappeared from the record, but they predate the Poor Law of 1547, which legislated for the provision of parish houses for the poor, and support Peregrine Horden and Marjorie McIntosh's

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<sup>51</sup> Harding, 'Families in later medieval London: sex, marriage and mortality', p. 30.

<sup>52</sup> Jim Bolton, 'The World Upside Down', in Mark Ormrod and Philip Lindley, eds., *The Black Death in England* (Stamford, 1996), pp. 34-40.

<sup>53</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 336.

<sup>54</sup> McIntosh, 'Local Responses to the Poor', p. 211.

<sup>55</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 293; Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp. 304, 305, 308; Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, pp. 64, 89.

<sup>56</sup> For further discussion about parish almshouses see Chapter Four, pp. 130-132.

assertions that parish-based poor relief was not a new achievement of the Tudors, but an official adoption of a practice that was already common.<sup>57</sup>

The first recognisable almshouse specifically for the poor of the parish in this study is Richard Whittington's Longhouse, which was founded for the poor of St. Martin Vintry parish before 1424. Whittington's Longhouse was probably founded during Whittington's lifetime, at a time when the population in London was probably low and poverty therefore not such a problem, and yet, as we have seen, there was still a level of local need. Whittington's Longhouse was followed by Our Lady of Assumption Almshouse in Westminster, built by Our Lady of Assumption Guild, a fraternity of lay brothers and sisters from the local parish, who raised the funds to build or buy four cottages in an alley for poor people in their local parish. The almshouse was found to be a chantry by the Chantry Commissioners in 1548 and was dissolved.<sup>58</sup>

The next references to parish almshouses also occur in the Chantry Certificates of 1548 when three, St. Clement Danes, St. Michael Cornhill and Kensington, Westminster, were shut down (though there appears to have been an almshouse operating at St Michael Cornhill in 1598).<sup>59</sup> This was unusual; almshouses, unlike hospitals, were often spared by the Chantry Commissioners. Given that these establishments were closed we can assume that they were founded by individuals or groups within the parish and associated with intercession for the dead, with the occupants being expected to pray for the founder's soul(s) and overseen by the parish. How much the foundation of these institutions was based on an assessment of local need on the part of the founders compared with a desire to pass through purgatory in a more comfortable way is impossible to say. The Chantry Certificates include references to other parish almshouses outside of the City of London and Westminster boundaries of this study, so they were also not isolated phenomena.

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<sup>57</sup> McIntosh, 'Local responses to the Poor', pp. 209-45; Peregrine Horden, 'Small Beer? The Parish and the Poor and Sick in Later Medieval England' in C. Burgess and E. Duffy eds., *The Parish in Late Medieval England* (Donnington, 2006), pp. 339-64.

<sup>58</sup> Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, p. 320. Kitching, *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate*, 139, St Margaret Westminster.

<sup>59</sup> See Appendix One pp. 313, 316, 305.

The closure of parish almshouses at this time coincided with the 1547 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and the Relief of Poor and Impotent Persons, which legislated for the building of parish poor houses. Certainly, the closure of the parish almshouses, or the legislative requirement for local authorities to build a poor house, did not dissuade people from founding new parish almshouses. Indeed when in 1547 Anne Wethers left her established almshouse, founded during her lifetime, to the local parish to manage for the use of five poor women, it would appear feasible that she was responding to local need as well as a desire to serve God and the well-being of her own soul and that of her family.<sup>60</sup> Between 1548 and 1600 four of the thirteen new almshouse foundations were built for the poor of the local parish, demonstrating both the piety of the founder and their sense of responsibility to the body politic in establishing institutions to take care of the local impotent poor. The sources are limited for these poor, small almshouses, but there is no indication of shame or coercion as suggested by Rexroth. The focus is on individual charity and piety rather than a considered city-wide welfare policy.

Angela Nicholls found, among other factors, that early-modern almshouses could help landowners fulfil their obligations to servants and tenants.<sup>61</sup> However, only one of the fifty-two foundations in this study, that projected by Thomas Cook (1478), expressly requested that former servants be given places in his almshouse. There is no supporting evidence that this almshouse was ever supported after his death. Certainly, there is evidence that post-Dissolution almshouses were established for family servants, but the earlier almshouses in this study do not follow this pattern. The majority were founded by lay people for the benefit of a specific social group, such as a fraternity, parish, or craft, rather than their immediate family, servants, or employees.

Where foundation documents or wills survive, the poverty of almspeople was required without exception. The Merchant Taylors' almshouse (1413), one of the first to be built in the City of London, was founded by the fraternity of John the Baptist for fellow liverymen who had fallen on hard times.<sup>62</sup> St. Augustine Papey (1442) was for 'poor

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<sup>60</sup> TNA PROB 11/31/716, p. 3.

<sup>61</sup> Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, p. 89.

<sup>62</sup> Matthew Davies ed., *The Merchant Taylors' Company of London: Court Minutes, 1486-1493* (Stamford, 2000), p. 23.

priests destroyed through poverty and detained by diseases, having nothing to live on.’<sup>63</sup> In 1478 Thomas Cook left his almshouse for ‘six pouer men such as bene blinde and such as been lame and may not goo.’<sup>64</sup> Being of good character was not always stipulated, but was more common in the better-endowed almshouses. Dame Elizabeth Mory asked for thirteen poor honest persons in her almshouse when she left it to the Armourers in 1551, and in 1578 Sir Ambrose Nicholas specified twelve old people, men and women, free of the City of London and not being young people, salters to be preferred before any others: ‘of honest name and fame.’<sup>65</sup> It is apparent that founders thought hard about their almshouses and considered whom they should be for and how they would function as communities.

The location of the almshouse foundations (see figure 3.1 and 3.2 above) may provide a clue to the intentions of the founders with regards to poverty.<sup>66</sup> Were almshouses founded in areas of the city associated with a greater degree of poverty? The fundamental problem associated with answering this question is that it is difficult to map poverty in the medieval City of London. Charlotte Berry approached this problem by analysing the surviving ward assessments for the City and, whilst finding that certain wards appeared more prosperous than others and returned a higher tax payment, she pointed out that this is a very crude assessment of wealth. Rather, she suggested that there could be a significant diversity of wealth between people living in the same area, with those living on prosperous commercial streets being richer than those living in tenements in the backstreets and alleyways behind those same streets.<sup>67</sup>

The earliest almshouses had a complex relationship with poverty and geography. Of the two fourteenth-century almshouse establishments, Elsyngspital was founded in the backstreets near Cripplegate, whilst St. Katharine’s was built in the approach to St. Katharine’s Church within the monastic precinct, outside the city wall. The area around

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<sup>63</sup> T. Hugo, ‘The Hospital of Le Papey in the City of London’, *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 5 (1877), pp. 183-221.

<sup>64</sup> TNA, PROB 11/6/467 (36 Wattys).

<sup>65</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 317, 295.

<sup>66</sup> For a discussion of the topography of almshouses in London in comparison with other European cities see Chapter Seven, pp. 235-9.

<sup>67</sup> Charlotte Berry, ‘Margins and marginality in fifteenth-century London’ (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Institute of Historical Research, School of Advanced Study, 2018), p. 92.

St. Katharine's hospital was poor, but the hospital precinct itself was wealthy and the almshouse was a prominent building. Early fifteenth-century almshouses varied widely. The Merchant Taylors' almshouse was built prominently on the main thoroughfare between the Merchant Taylors' guildhall and the parish Church of St. Martin Outwich. By contrast, Henry Barton's Almshouse, sometimes referred to as Barton's Alley, was a back alley which opened onto Wood Street, the main thoroughfare between Cripplegate and the centre of the City of London.<sup>68</sup>

Whittington's almshouses demonstrate the complexity even better. Whittington's Longhouse was comprised of six almshouses built over a public toilet on a wharf in the parish of St. Martin Vintry, a very humble site whilst also being very visible, whereas Whittington's Almshouse was built on the site of his old house in a prestigious position next to St. Michael Paternoster.

Later almshouses continue this tension between poverty and prominence. For example, the Countess of Kent founded an almshouse in an alley behind her property in Whitefriars in 1537; Dame Elizabeth Mory left an almshouse in Love Alley, behind Love Lane in the parish of St. Olave Jewry in 1551; John Richmond left Christopher Alley, behind his property in Seacoal Lane to be used as an Almshouse for the Armourers' Company in his will of 1559; and Sir Thomas Gresham left almshouses in an alley behind his grand house in Bishopsgate Street in 1575.<sup>69</sup> Some almshouses were wealthy and occupied prominent positions on the street front. Others were poor and hidden away in back alleys and yards. Others were in poor areas (back alleys) but had an elaborate gate onto the main street.

Many of these early almshouses were built on cheaper property available in backstreets and alleys, but in areas that had meaning for the founder, rather than being a targeted policy of poor relief to manage poverty in the poorer areas of the City. Possibly founders were looking for cheap property to house their almspeople (back-alley property), but also wanted the social recognition for their charity (gate onto the main street). Equally it may be that the almshouse founders wanted to emphasise the poverty and related holiness of the almshouse, pointing out to contemporary society

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<sup>68</sup> See Appendix One, p. 301.

<sup>69</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 293, 295, 304, 318.

on the main street that wealth is vanity, and that holiness and redemption are found in humility and prayer. In this way the almshouse's situation itself could be a work of educational spiritual mercy. These locations were also practical. They used property that was readily available and adjacent to the residence of the founder and within property boundaries they already owned so reducing expense. All these concepts and ideas appear to be held in tension within the almshouse.

Company almshouses continued this practical use of property. Many were built within or on land adjacent to the company guildhall, including the Merchant Taylors' Almshouse, Brewers' Almshouse, Knolles' Almshouse for the Grocers, Girdlers' Almshouse, Carpenters' Almshouse, Thomas Beaumont's (Salters') Almshouse, Vintners' Almshouse, the Cutlers' Almshouse and the Haberdashers' Almshouse.<sup>70</sup> The precinct of the guildhall itself seems to have resonance for these founders. Perhaps the idea of the guildhall providing shelter for members of the company who had fallen on hard times was particularly meaningful, or perhaps the prayers of the grateful poor almspeople were felt to provide protection to the hall and company as a whole.<sup>71</sup> It is interesting to note that following the Great Fire of London in 1666 the guildhalls were rebuilt in situ, but the almshouses were all relocated to less valuable land outside the City of London.<sup>72</sup>

Frank Rexroth theorised that the limitation of recipients to parish, trade or ward, enabled testators to control the poor and ensure their worthiness.<sup>73</sup> He saw this emphasis on worthiness as evidence of control and coercion, of marginalising those deemed unacceptable and keeping the respectable in behavioural control by making the provision of housing in old age conditional on poor people's adherence to social norms. This is a subject that will be explored in detail later in this thesis. However, the initial evidence found here shows a much more complex picture.<sup>74</sup> Far from being a generalised vehicle for civic control, almshouses were much more ad hoc and variable. The almshouses were individual and aimed at specific social groups of meaning to the

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<sup>70</sup> See Appendix One pp. 309, 292, 306, 299, 292, 318, 320, 294, 300.

<sup>71</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', p. 4.

<sup>72</sup> See Chapter Three, p. 84.

<sup>73</sup> Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp. 225- 227.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter Six, pp. 215-6.

founder. They were for people of a similar background and social standing, perhaps in an attempt to form a community that would have shared values and experience and so might have a better chance of living in harmony (or charity) with each other.

Therefore, the parish poor were catered for, with almshouses founded expressly for them, whereas liverymen and freemen of the City who had fallen on hard times were also provided for, at the whim of the founder. They were not expected to live with the parish poor, but with people of a similar social background. These early almshouse foundations were catering for people in poverty, but in a socially stratified way.

Worthiness was often, but not universally, required.

Although the almshouse foundations were influenced by individual perceptions of local need, there were also social and religious factors that influenced their foundation. One thing that stands out from the data is the increasing numbers of lay founders of almshouses across the period 1330 to 1600 (see figure 3.4 above). Phillips's 2001 study of the charitable institutions of East Anglia also found that most post-1450 almshouses were founded by lay people.<sup>75</sup> Additionally, Derek Spruce and Steve Taylor found that all the post-Dissolution almshouses in Hampshire were founded by lay people.<sup>76</sup> Part of the reason for this was the structure of medieval society, which held the relationship between Christ, his disciples and the Church as an ideal to be emulated, along with the increasing education, wealth and social influence of middle-ranking lay members of society during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

The concentration of wealthy civic office holders among early lay fifteenth-century almshouse founders is particularly marked. Three out of four lay almshouse founders in London between 1400 and 1449, Richard Whittington, Henry Barton, and Thomas Knolles, were former mayors of London. As civic leaders these men would have been very aware of local needs and issues. A strong sense of civic responsibility as demonstrated by attaining a leading role in civic office, was a key feature of both fifteenth and early sixteenth-century almshouse founders. Half (fourteen of twenty-eight) across the whole study period held high civic offices, such as mayor, alderman,

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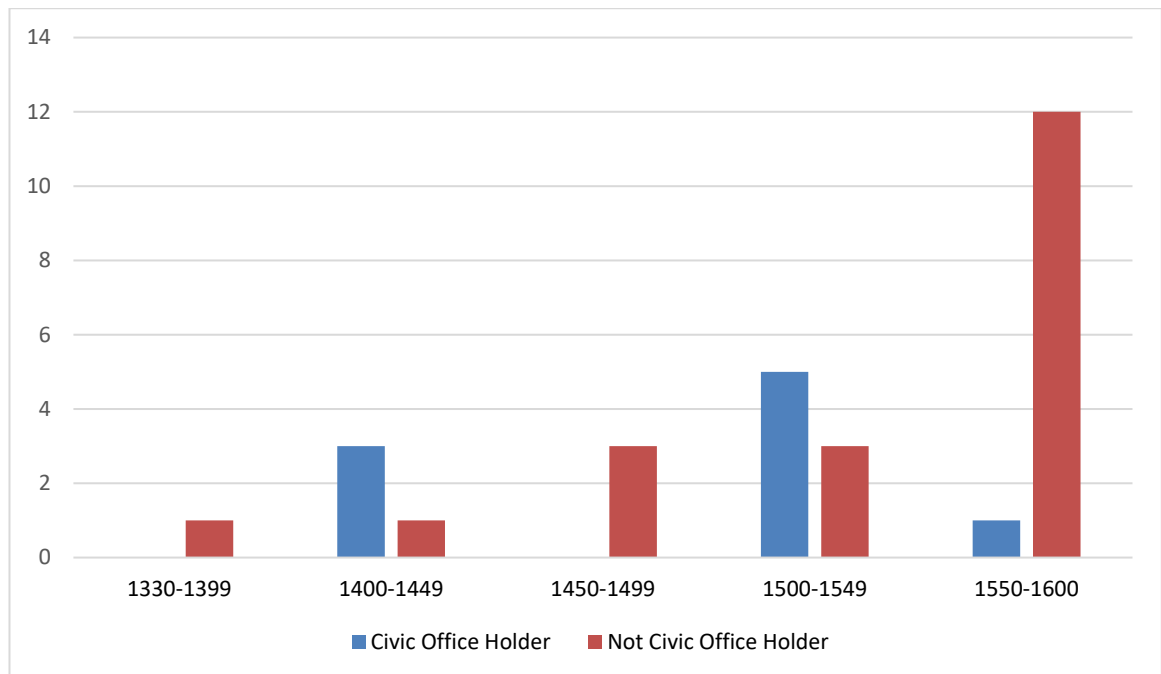
<sup>75</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 127.

<sup>76</sup> Spruce and Taylor, 'Hampshire Hospitals and Almshouses 1100 to 1640', p. 77.



sheriff, or member of parliament, but the proportion was higher in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries (see figure 3.10 below).

*Figure 3.10: Lay Almshouse founders in London and Westminster who held Civic Office 1330-1600*



As we have seen, increasing education and a desire to take control of the individual's relationship with God played a large part in the practical application of the theological concept of charity. Associated with this was a desire on the part of educated pious merchants to mirror the example of Jesus as described in the New Testament, with Jesus as the good shepherd, presiding over a happy and healthy flock. During the late-medieval and Tudor period, society was often conceptualised as a body with the King at its head and every part of the body important to the good functioning of the whole. It was the duty of every Christian, part of his essential role in the body politic, to maintain order in society and create an environment that represented a healthy whole. The expression of this duty can be found in the wills of the better-off, leaving money for public works, the maintenance of bridges and roads and for alms to the poor.<sup>77</sup> The civic leaders of London viewed themselves as temporal Lords, at the head of London society. The desire of civic leaders of London for equality of status with temporal Lords was demonstrated in the *Liber Albus*.

<sup>77</sup> Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, pp. 249-257.

The *Liber Albus*, an early fifteenth-century manual for the administration of the City of London, was written because the plague had caused problems for the civic administration of London due to the loss of knowledge about how it functioned. The first part of the *Liber Albus* detailed the role of different members of the civic administration, the rights and duties of the incumbents and the traditions and ceremonies that took place throughout the year. It also emphasised the historic nobility of the civic representatives of London. From the beginning the author, John Carpenter, and Richard Whittington (who was deeply involved in the writing of the book) set out to illustrate how the Aldermen and Mayor of London have had the status of what Carpenter called 'Barons of our City of London' since time immemorial. The nobility of the civic leaders of London was emphasised repeatedly, to the extent that in Book Two John Carpenter stopped referring to aldermen and instead just called them 'Barons'.

Prospective Mayors of London had to serve as both sheriff and alderman before they could be elected as Lord Mayor. The *Liber Albus* detailed the rank and qualifications that should be looked for in prospective aldermen:

These Aldermen too, in respect of name as well as dignity, it is evident, were anciently called 'Barones.' ... [description of the noble burial of a Baron/Alderman] ... Indeed, no person was accepted as alderman unless he was free from deformity in body, wise and discreet in mind, rich, honest, trustworthy free and on no account of low or servile condition...<sup>78</sup>

The association between the role of Christ as head of the Church and the role of the Mayor, Master, Warden or Lord as head of the social group was not lost on medieval society. Good lords were expected to mirror the life of Christ in a small way, particularly in terms of charity and care for the poorest members of the household or organisation, and this relationship was most clearly expressed in a feast.<sup>79</sup> Whether lords in their manorial halls, or merchants in their guildhalls, feasting involved a top table on a dais, with the master in the centre as the lord of all he surveyed. In the late-

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<sup>78</sup> John Carpenter, *Liber Albus: The White Book of the City of London 1419*, trans. Henry Thomas Riley (London, 1861), p. 29.

<sup>79</sup> Michel Jeanneret, *A Feast of Words, Banquets and Table Talk in the Renaissance*, trans. Jeremy Whiteley and Emma Hughes (Cambridge, 1991), p. 17; Bridget Ann Henisch, *Fast and Feast, Food in Medieval Society* (Pennsylvania, 1976), p. 195.

Middle Ages, the Last Supper was usually depicted with Jesus at the centre of the table and the Disciples gathered around eating and listening (see figure 3.11 below). The similarity between that scene and many others featuring kings, lords or merchants feasting (see figure 3.12 below), with the most powerful man depicted in the central position like Christ, with his fellows arrayed around him like the Disciples, makes it apparent that the painter wished to draw a comparison between the great lord and Christ.<sup>80</sup> Rosser suggested that there was also a contemporary association between the distribution of bread at the end of the parish Mass and the fraternity feast.<sup>81</sup> The inference from all of these associations is that merchants and lords wanted to be like Christ, and for others to see that association too. Works of charity and mercy, like almshouses, were an extension of that desire.<sup>82</sup>



Figure 3.11: *The Last Supper, Hours of Elizabeth the Queen 1420-1430, BL Add. 50001*

<sup>80</sup> K. Giles and J. Clark, 'St. Mary's Guildhall, Boston, Lincolnshire: the archaeology of a medieval "public" building', *Medieval Archaeology* 55 (2011), pp. 226- 256.

<sup>81</sup> Gervase Rosser, 'Going to the Fraternity Feast: Commensality and Social Relations in Later Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies*, 33 4 (1994), p. 433.

<sup>82</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', p. 4.



Figure 3.12: *The King feasting from The Talbot Shrewsbury Book c 1444-45, (Rouen), BL Royal 15 E VI fol 22v*

The association between high civic office and charity also underlined this connection with the head of the body politic and Christ. Therefore, it was expected that those in high office should exercise charity.<sup>83</sup> This link was also underlined by the route of the seven yearly mayoral processions, barring the first which was to Westminster to see the King, which always included a visit to a symbol of charity, hospital and a Church.<sup>84</sup>

The role of head of an organisation as a mirror of Christ, whether the organisation was a kingdom, the City of London, or a company, clearly came with obligations towards the wellbeing of servants, workers and vassals and, importantly, the smooth running of associated communities, be they the local parish or company. Jordan's 1960 work on the *Charities of London* attempted to chart the charitable aspirations of the people of London between 1480 and 1660. From his work it is clear that the wealthy citizens of London made charitable bequests not only within the City, but also, and to a greater extent, to the country as a whole, particularly their birth communities with whom they retained ties of family and friendship. Jordan estimates that three-quarters of English counties received large donations from residents of London and that their donations outside the City and Middlesex were larger than within it.<sup>85</sup> Jordan defined these

<sup>83</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', p. 19.

<sup>84</sup> Carpenter, *Liber Albus*, p. 23. This practice continued after the Dissolution of the Monasteries. The link between charity and the annual processions of the Mayor of London is discussed further in Chapter Seven, pp. 267-270.

<sup>85</sup> Jordan, *Charities of London*, p. 308.

‘benefactors’ as ‘great merchants’ and found 438 of them active charitably between 1480 and 1660; of these 166 were mayors of London.<sup>86</sup> The data in this study encompasses a different time-frame, but demonstrates a similar association between civic office and the foundation of almshouses until the late sixteenth century when lay people who did not hold civic office, including women, began to feature more prominently as founders.

Early founders were, without exception, wealthy; some, for example Richard Whittington, extremely wealthy. By the sixteenth century some less wealthy lay founders can be found, such as Anne Wethers and Thomas Cook, but this is only in relation to the extreme wealth of early founders. Part of the reason for this may, again, lie in the sources. The better-endowed institutions tend to be the ones that survive in the records. The only evidence of both Thomas Cook’s and Anne Wethers’ almshouses is in their wills and they were short-lived small institutions for family servants (Cook) and the local worthy poor (Wethers).

Christine Carpenter argued that almshouse foundation became a fashion in the fifteenth century and moved down the social hierarchy ‘becoming less grandiose in the process’.<sup>87</sup> Carole Rawcliffe also wrote about the crown and aristocracy setting a fashion for charity.<sup>88</sup> This could be said to be borne out to some extent by the almshouse foundations of London and Westminster. Certainly, lay almshouse foundations increased inexorably through this period; however, I am not convinced that fashion was the main driving cause in London at least. Perhaps the reason that the foundation of almshouses appears to have become fashionable was that it was also practical and useful and stood the test of time. Elaine Phillips suggested that founding an almshouse ‘undoubtedly provided a visual proclamation of a family’s arrival into society: this may have been all the more important for merchants, whose status placed them in a potentially socially ambiguous position.’<sup>89</sup> However, many of the fifteenth and sixteenth-century almshouse founders were not in socially ambiguous positions;

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<sup>86</sup> Jordan, *Charities of London*, p. 316.

<sup>87</sup> Christine Carpenter, ‘The religion of the gentry of fifteenth-century England’, in *England in the Fifteenth Century: Proceedings of the 1986 Harlaxton Symposium* (Woodbridge, 1987), p. 67.

<sup>88</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 286. Rawcliffe, ‘Dives Redeemed?’, p. 7.

<sup>89</sup> Phillips, ‘Charitable Institutions’, p. 34.

they were often prominent, well-established and respected members of the civic elite. I am not disputing that they used their charity to advertise their own respectability - both Henry Barton and Sir John Milbourne who founded almshouses nearly 100 years apart built gates at the entrances advertising their charity to all who passed.<sup>90</sup> Richard Whittington paid for repairs to the gate house at St Bartholomew's Hospital and had his arms prominently displayed above the arch.<sup>91</sup> But all these edifices in stone were erected near the end of their lives, when they did not need increased trade and had already achieved the highest office available to them. Perhaps there was an element of charity in this advertising, a lending of respectability even, from the founder to the poor people living inside the institutions, and in return the edifices and residents gave to the founders a permanent memorial in the landscape, and prayer.<sup>92</sup> But I do not think that the majority of these early almshouse founders felt the need to either follow fashion or proclaim their arrival in society.

The years between 1500 and 1549 saw a large increase in lay foundations, including, for the first time, two foundations by lay women. The first was founded by the Countess of Kent in 1537 just before the Dissolution, and the second by Anne Wethers in 1547. Previously there had been two almshouses founded by royal women: St. Katharine's almshouse, established by Queen Philippa in 1354; and Lady Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse, which was built at the Westminster Almonry in 1502. Lady Margaret Beaufort was known for trying to reinforce her position and power as the King's mother, and her piety, and both these factors may have influenced her to establish an almshouse at Westminster Abbey close to her residence and Henry VII's Almshouse. The Countess of Kent was also very pious and by her third marriage to Richard Grey, third Earl of Kent (eighth creation) in 1521 she became aunt to Queen Elizabeth, wife of Henry VII. Lady Margaret Beaufort (mother to Henry VII) was also associated with the Earls of Kent, as the daughter of the sister of the third Earl of Kent (sixth creation). Though forty-six years junior to Margaret Beaufort, the Countess of Kent seems to have taken her as a role model and after her husband's death she took

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<sup>90</sup> GA MS 30727/1 Skinners' Company Receipts and Payments book; Milbourn, 'The Milbourn Almshouses', p. 141.

<sup>91</sup> N. Kerling ed., *The Cartulary of St. Bartholomew's Hospital London* (London, 1973), pp. 175-17.

<sup>92</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 247-8.



up residence at Whitefriars Monastery and established an almshouse there. After this action of the Countess of Kent a small trickle of other women in London established almshouses in their own right.

Wealthy widows in London benefitted from more rights than women in many other parts of the country. Caroline Barron found that the common law of England ensured that a woman had a share of her husband's lands after his death that she was entitled to enjoy until her own death.<sup>93</sup> In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries it became common among wealthy couples for an estate to be purchased jointly at the time of marriage, which would then pass to the widow after the death of her spouse. Wealthy widows in London during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were empowered to continue or initiate a business in their own right and to join in the social and economic life of guilds and fraternities.<sup>94</sup> This economic independence enabled wealthy widows to begin to take control of their own piety and found works of charity in their own right. These works of charity might include an almshouse.

The last almshouse founded in 1595 in this study was by Lady Anne Dacre and was a large, grandiose almshouse that also argues against Carpenter's assertion that almshouses tended to move down the social hierarchy and become less grandiose. Certainly, lay almshouse founders became more diverse and other members of the social elite, not just civic leaders, joined the ranks of almshouse founders. But, in the City of London and Westminster at least, they remained the pet project of a minority: rich, pious, elite, educated, and compassionate, but still a minority of the social elite.

The educated and wealthy founders of almshouses at the beginning of the fifteenth century were also politically active. Elaine Phillips suggested that almshouses were born out of an increasing disposition among lay people to reform charitable institutions and exercise control over their own spiritual and temporal affairs.<sup>95</sup> The creation of the early fifteenth-century almshouses in the City of London supports this assertion and demonstrates the frustration and impatience at both ecclesiastical and

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<sup>93</sup> Caroline Barron, 'The 'Golden Age' of Women', *Reading Medieval Studies*, XV, *Medieval Women in Southern England* (1989), p. 35.

<sup>94</sup> Caroline Barron, 'Introduction, The Widows World in Later Medieval London', in Caroline Barron and Anne Sutton eds., *Medieval London Widows 1300-1500* (London, 1994), p. xiii.

<sup>95</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 132.

parliamentary authorities' lack of power and the will to act in the face of corruption and incompetence in the management of hospitals.

Problems with the older traditional medieval hospitals had been the subject of debate well before the Black Death arrived in Europe. In 1311 Pope Clement V issued a decree which stated that hospitals and *leprosaria* across Europe were allowing their buildings to fall into disrepair and neglecting their duty to the poor.<sup>96</sup> The clerics in charge of hospitals were told to mend their ways and hospital authorities were ordered to give an account of the goods of the hospital on a yearly basis. The Lollards' 'Twelve Conclusions,' published in 1395, raised the profile of dissatisfaction with the administration of hospitals. Two of the conclusions mention hospitals; the first equates the benefaction of hospitals (called 'alms houses') with simony; the second was a reference to the Lollard plan to take the endowments of religious organisations and give them to the king and fund 100 almshouses for the sick.<sup>97</sup>

Nothing came immediately of the Lollards' Conclusions, but then in 1410 and 1414 members of the House of Commons petitioned the king, asking him to divest the Church of its temporal property and establish 100 almshouses each endowed with 100 marks. The reason given was that the clerics and secular administrators had destroyed all the almshouses in the country and therefore the new almshouses should be under the supervision of good and true lay people, reflecting nearly exactly the Lollards' proposal. Each town in the country was to be responsible for the support of its own poor, but, if the burden was too great, then the almshouses could help. The 1410 petition was unsuccessful, but in 1414 another, less strident petition decrying the misappropriation of endowments granted to hospitals by both spiritual and lay folk resulted in a statute for the inspection of hospitals. The parliament of March 1416 hosted an angry debate because the statute had not been implemented, to which King Henry V responded: '*Soit l'estatut ent fait garde et mys en deu execucione*' - Let the statute made on this be kept and duly enforced.<sup>98</sup> However, no action ensued from

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<sup>96</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, I pp. 374-6.

<sup>97</sup> Cronin, 'The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards', p. 299.

<sup>98</sup> 'Henry V: April 1414', in Chris Given-Wilson, Paul Brand, Seymour Phillips, Mark Ormrod, Geoffrey Martin, Anne Curry and Rosemary Horrox eds., *Parliament Rolls of Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 2005), British History Online <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/no-series/parliament-rolls-medieval/april-1414> [accessed 27 January 2021]. Rawcliffe, 'A Crisis of Confidence?', pp. 85-110.



this statute and the situation remained the same. Clearly the management of hospitals was an issue for people attending parliament in the early fifteenth century, but to what extent were early almshouse founders involved in this debate?

The early fifteenth-century almshouse founders in the City of London were all involved in both national and local politics at the time. John Churchman (or Chircheman), Alderman of the City of London, left money to the Merchant Taylors' Company, who built a new style of almshouse between their guildhall and the Church of St. Martin Outwich in 1413, right in the middle of the period of the parliamentary debates about the need for reform of the hospitals.<sup>99</sup> Thomas Knolles, founder of the Grocers' Almshouse, was Mayor of London in 1410; both Richard Whittington, Thomas Knolles as aldermen and Henry Barton as Mayor of London were involved in electing the member of parliament who attended the March 1414 parliament. Whittington and Knolles were both elected to represent the City of London in the October 1416 parliament. Henry Barton was elected to represent the City of London as member of parliament in 1419. Therefore, all three would have been aware of these petitions and to varying extents involved in the debates. In addition to this, from the fourteenth century aldermen had been drafted in to supervise failing hospitals, so the good administration of hospitals was a topic of interest to them.<sup>100</sup>

Henry Barton, Richard Whittington, and Thomas Knolles also had an active relationship with each other.<sup>101</sup> All three appeared as witnesses at the same mayoral elections and feature together in many entries in the City of London's letter books. Richard Whittington and Thomas Knolles witnessed the transactions of several properties purchased by Henry Barton and Henry Barton and Thomas Knolles took an active part in the complex series of property transactions that preceded the foundation of Richard Whittington's Almshouse.<sup>102</sup> It would appear that Whittington, Barton and Knolles saw each other regularly through both their civic and business roles. They were also all

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<sup>99</sup> Matthew P. Davies, 'The Tailors of London: Corporate Charity in the Late Medieval Town', in R. Archer, ed., *Crown, Government and People in the Fifteenth Century* (Stroud, 1995), pp. 161-190.

<sup>100</sup> Rawcliffe, 'A Crisis of Confidence?' pp. 85-110.

<sup>101</sup> Political Biographies of all three men can be found in Linda Clark, J. S. Roskell, and Carole Rawcliffe, eds., *The Commons 1386-1421*, 4 vols (Stroud, 1992), II pp. 135-8 (Barton), III pp. 531-3 (Knolles), IV pp. 846-9 (Whittington).

<sup>102</sup> GA MS 30836, Skinners' Company Calendar, Section 5, pp. 141-168. Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, pp. 20, 22, 30, 61, n1.

aldermen and participated in a regular round of meetings, processions, feasts, and elections. It seems reasonable to suggest that they discussed with each other the problem of failing hospitals, the parliamentary petitions and their own almshouse projects.

The petition of 1410 is known as the Lollard petition, but Whittington, Barton and Knolles were not Lollards. All three left extensive chantry endowments, not the behaviour expected of committed Lollards. However, the parts of the Lollard Conclusions regarding the management of hospitals clearly resonated with them and, after the petition had failed, all three took steps to establish an almshouse independently, and in a form that was quite different to a traditional medieval hospital. Their new institutions were known as 'almshouses', echoing the Lollard Conclusions – a term not used by Parliament in the statute of 1414, which continued to talk about 'hospitals' - which differentiated their new institutions from old traditional medieval hospitals. The new almshouse institutions were focussed on the individual, with private living accommodation for residents; they were small institutions independent from but related to the local parish church.<sup>103</sup> Barton, Knolles and Whittington passed management of their almshouses to their respective livery companies, again echoing the 1410 parliamentary petition that the almshouses be administered by lay men, good and true.

The second half of the fifteenth century saw an apparent lull in the formation of almshouses in London and Westminster, which was followed by fresh enthusiasm for foundations in the early sixteenth century. This new phase of almshouse building was started by Henry VII, who built a new almshouse at Westminster Abbey in 1502, and his mother Lady Margaret Beaufort, who built an almshouse at the Westminster Almonry, also in 1502. It was also heralded by a fresh petition to the King by parliament in 1512 again decrying the poor management of hospitals and almshouses that left the poor, sick and needy without help and dying on the streets.<sup>104</sup> Once again, like the petitions of the early fifteenth century, this petition was destined to failure, but sixteen new almshouses were built in London and Westminster between 1500 and

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<sup>103</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 237-9.

<sup>104</sup> Rawcliffe, 'A Crisis of Confidence?', pp. 85-110.

1549. The petitions to parliament about the state of hospitals and almshouses in the early fifteenth and sixteenth centuries seem to be evidence of a groundswell of public opinion, which, although ineffective in parliamentary terms, galvanised active wealthy citizens who were determined to change the status quo.

### 3.3 Conclusion

Despite the problem of establishing foundation dates, it is clear that almshouses were emerging in London well before the arrival of the Black Death. However, the effect of the Black Death on population and patterns of poverty within the city meant that almshouses were an apt response to the growing numbers of elderly people without family support. Only one almshouse in London and Westminster during this period, St. James', seems to have evolved from a medieval leprosy hospital.<sup>105</sup> None of the almshouses in this study evolved from a traditional medieval hospital, but several of the hospitals in the City of London built almshouses to complement their charitable activity. Instead, in the City of London and Westminster, almshouses appear to be a new type of institution, born at a time of frustration at the corruption and mismanagement of the older hospitals during the fourteenth century, and the apparent inability of both parliamentary and ecclesiastical authorities to deal with the issue. The early fourteenth-century almshouses arose from the desire of lay people to meet the needs of people within their local areas and demonstrate to the authorities how to run a proper charitable institution, to take control of their spiritual and temporal destinies, and to make things better for the people in their local communities, parish or company, who had fallen into poverty. This is demonstrated by the early appearance of parish almshouses founded by local individuals or fraternities banding together to provide bodily and spiritual care for local needs. This quiet revolution, the development of a new institution called an almshouse, happened at the end of a century of quiet evolution on the part of leprosy hospitals and frustration with the administration of older hospitals, culminating in the Lollards' Conclusions. The new almshouses in the City of London were a physical expression of the ideas promoted by both the Lollards' Conclusions and the 1410 and 1414 petitions to Parliament. This was a development the state appears to have observed and then

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<sup>105</sup> See Appendix One, p.314.

made use of in the 1547 Act for the Punishment of Vagabonds and the Relief of the Poor and Impotent Persons, which legislated for the building of parish poor houses.

There was no single causal factor that led to the development of almshouses in the City of London and Westminster. Instead, there were many layers of inspiration and motivation. However, mortality experience, in the form of the death of children or spouse, does not seem to be a prime motivating factor. The majority of almshouses were established during the lifetime of the founder, when spouses were alive, and the siring of children was still possible. Clearly one of the prime motivating factors was piety, whether that arose from fear of purgatory or a sophisticated understanding or a compassionate heart for the poor or all three. Andrew Brown suggested that the desire for efficacious intercession was also a prime motivator for the foundation of almshouses in Bruges.<sup>106</sup> Improvements in lay understanding of the works of spiritual and bodily mercy resulted in founders becoming more sophisticated in the wide-ranging charitable projects they undertook, of which almshouses were often just one part.

It is impossible to separate the piety of founders from their desire to look after the poor. Poverty was one of the few universal requirements of almshouse founders. The geographical position of almshouses within the City of London demonstrates a complex relationship between humility and pride and display. The almshouses were sometimes newly built in places of wealth and prestige, but more often they utilised humble, poor back alleys. Almshouses varied in size, style, rule, and target population, but the vast majority required that the residents be poor. What was meant by the term poor varied, dependent upon the group of people the founder identified as potential residents. The parish-based almshouses were specifically for the poor of the local parish. Other institutions were set up for particular populations, for example sub-groups within a City company. The almshouses were therefore socially stratified; they were not part of global civic policy; people of different social backgrounds were not expected to share an almshouse. The residents of almshouses were not decided on the basis of greatest need; rather the founders sought to provide for specific populations,

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<sup>106</sup> Andrew Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges* (Cambridge, 2011), p. 210.

who had meaning to them and had a relationship with them, and whose needs they were personally aware of; not usually for servants or household, but wider populations, such as companies, fraternity or parish.

While piety and the well-being of the soul were the main motivator of almshouse founders, education, wealth, and civic position gave individuals the breadth of understanding of the problem and associated issues, such as charity, piety, and poverty. They also had access, through social networks, travel, and education, to new ideas about how to tackle these issues. A desire for increased social position and prestige might also have been a motivator for founding an almshouse as it assisted individuals' and society's perceptions of lay civic leaders as temporal lords.

As the fifteenth century progressed almshouse founders became more diverse. Lay people from outside the ranks of the civic elite founded almshouses and women began to establish almshouses in their own right. These trends continued across the Reformation as the concepts that underpinned the almshouses shifted. The Dissolution affected almshouse foundation by forcing the closure of many older parish establishments and temporarily slowing the trend of new foundations. No longer was relief from purgatory an explicit motivator for the foundation of almshouses, but nevertheless the almshouses endured, possibly bolstered by the foundation of an almshouse by Henry VIII after the Dissolution. Charity remained an expression of love, of both God and fellow man, and human need remained. New foundations post-Dissolution were more likely to be parish-based, which may reflect the increasing population and rising levels of need within London.

The concept of an almshouse was complex and changed subtly over time, starting as a practical embodiment of theological ideology concerning the nature of charity, demonstrating the founder's intellectual quality as well as their wealth and piety. Almshouses were an expression of a complex understanding of charity, especially the lesser known spiritual works of charity. Almshouses were usually part of a larger, complete, work of charity on the part of the founder, which catered for nearly every part of the spiritual and bodily works of mercy. Almshouses were very practical in their conception and expression and, as such, were recognised by the state as a sensible

approach to coping with the problems of the impotent poor, as reflected in the inclusion of cottages for the poor in the statutes and the continuity of almshouse provision down the ages.

Many questions remain, however. For example, was the trend in almshouse foundation demonstrated in London and Westminster replicated across England and the rest of Europe? Did the founders achieve their aims? Were the almshouses better run and longer lasting than their predecessors, the medieval hospital? Chapter Four will examine the economic and administrative legacy of almshouse founders and find out how well these new institutions stood the test of time.

## Chapter Four: The Administration of Almshouses and European Comparisons

...which hospitalles & almes housses ffor the mere partie ben sufford to  
fall in ruyne & decaye...<sup>1</sup>

As we have seen in Chapter Three, concern about the administration of hospitals was so widespread that it was discussed in Parliament in the early fifteenth century. A new type of institution, the almshouse, emerged in the fourteenth and early fifteenth-century. The foundation of the early fifteenth century almshouses in the City of London, coincided with petitions to parliament that reflected frustration on the part of lay people at failure to remedy perceived abuses of power in the older medieval hospitals. The administration of hospitals and almshouses continued to be a matter of concern for members of parliament in the early sixteenth-century, as the extract above from a petition to parliament in 1512 demonstrates. This petition, which was presented in the name of the ‘poor, blynd, lame, sore, miserable & impotent people of this land’, articulated concerns that the wishes and intentions of founders with regard to the management and financial administration of hospitals and almshouses were being disregarded, and that the needs of the poor were being neglected, and that they were forced to lie in the street and die.<sup>2</sup>

Despite the failure of the 1512 petition to produce legislation, the foundation of almshouses increased markedly during the early sixteenth century. Unlike almshouses founded by lay people, religious, royal and company almshouses were not dependent on a single individual for their continued existence. Lay almshouse founders had to think carefully about how to structure the administration of their foundation after their deaths, to try and ensure their long-term survival. The majority of almshouses, forty-seven out of fifty-two in this study, were lifetime, rather than post-mortem foundations. Indeed, several lay founders went so far as to live in community with the residents of their almshouses, a phenomenon not restricted to the almshouses of

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<sup>1</sup> A Petition for the Reform of Hospitals, Presented to the Parliament of 1512, TNA, E 175/11/65.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. Carole Rawcliffe speculates on the identity of the people who presented the 1512 petition for the Reform of Hospitals, one of whom may have been Thomas Moore. Rawcliffe, ‘A Crisis of Confidence?’, pp. 105-106.

London and Westminster.<sup>3</sup> Also almshouses established communally by a company or fraternity were sited in, or close by the guildhall or fraternity Church. Almshouses, therefore, were very personal to the founder(s) and their continuity and continuing good administration following the founder's death was of great importance, both to the health of the souls of the founders and families (or members of the founding organisations), and in terms of their personal relationships with the almspeople with whom they lived.

So, how successful were the administrators at running almshouses? This chapter will examine the ongoing administration of almshouses in London and Westminster between 1330 and 1600. It will look initially at the declining popularity of ecclesiastical almshouse administration, followed by the rising popularity of company administration and lay administration, concluding the first section of this chapter with an examination of parish almshouses and the common factors which link long-lived foundations. The second part of this chapter seeks to set the development of almshouse administrations in London and Westminster within the context of the rest of England and other parts of Europe, examining comparable institutions in Norwich, Bruges, and Florence.

## 4.1 Administration

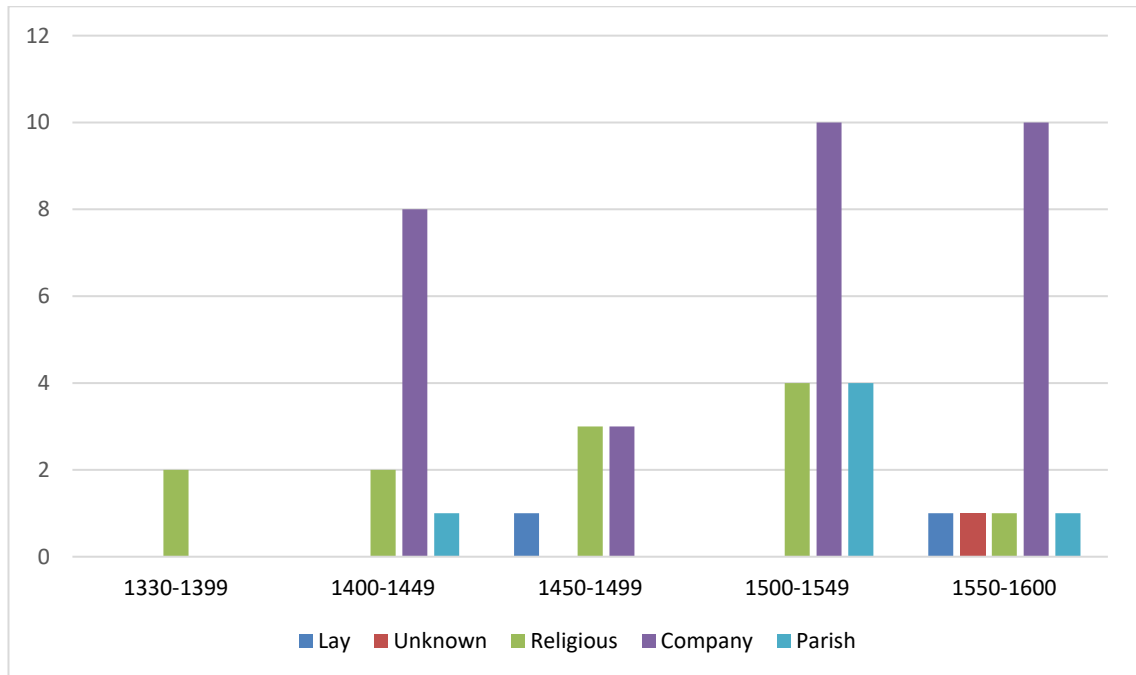
The secondary administration of almshouses (see figure 4.1 below), consisted of the people or organisations chosen to administer the almshouse after the death of the original founder. The identity of these people or organisations, and their trustworthiness, was understandably a topic of concern for the founders. As time progressed many lay almshouse founders went to great lengths to ensure that their almshouses would continue in the form and manner that they had established. Founders sought legal safeguards for their almshouses through wills, indentures, ordinances, letters patent and other legal agreements, to bind the future guardians to the well-being of the almshouse.

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<sup>3</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', pp. 16-17.



*Figure 4.1: Secondary administration of almshouses founded in London and Westminster 1330 - 1600*

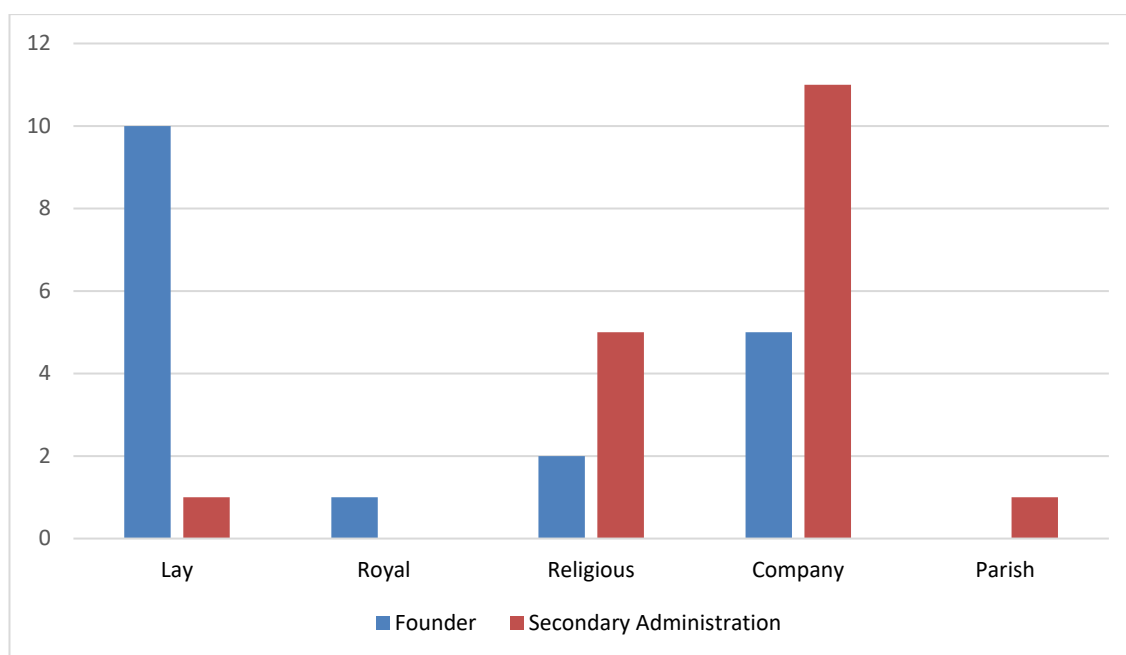


In London and Westminster, the body that was responsible for the administrative oversight and financial accountability of the almshouse was often not responsible for its day-to-day management. For many, particularly the almshouses administered by City companies or lay organisations, the day-to-day management was devolved to the almshouse residents as a group or to a warden or tutor, sometimes appointed from the almshouse residents themselves. For others, principally the almshouses run by religious organisations, the administration and day-to-day management were the responsibility of a master or warden, who was accountable to the bishop. The diversity of potential administrators for the almshouse was a new development. For the old traditional medieval hospitals, the most popular option in London was to establish the institution as a religious house, or to give it to an established religious house to administer. However, the situation was different in other parts of the country. For example, Sheila Sweetinburgh found that hospitals in east Kent were predominantly founded by lay townsmen.<sup>4</sup> In the fifteenth century the City companies also emerged as stable long-term corporate bodies and it was to them that many lay almshouse founders in London, turned.

<sup>4</sup> Sweetinburgh, *The Role of the Hospital in Medieval England*, p. 97.

The first almshouse founders in London, William Elsyng and Queen Philippa, resorted to religious organisations to administer their foundations. Queen Philippa refounded St Katharine’s Hospital in 1354 and established an almshouse as a new part of the foundation. She retained the ecclesiastical collegiate administrative body and the traditional charitable activities of the original foundation. William Elsyng established Elsyngspital in 1330 with the original intention to found a hospital (that was more like an almshouse) with a college of priests to administer the foundation, and a chapel.<sup>5</sup> From the fifteenth century founders increasingly turned from established religious foundations to trusted secular organisations in the form of City companies to administer their almshouses.

*Figure 4.2: Founder and Secondary Administration of New Almshouse Foundations in London and Westminster 1400-1499*



The five almshouses (see figure 4.2 above), out of eighteen established between 1400 and 1499, that were committed to long-term administration by religious organisations were St Augustine Papey, which was founded and then administered by the fraternity of brothers and sisters of St Charity and St John Evangelist, which contained a mixture of lay and ordained members; *Domus Conversorum*, an almshouse for impoverished converts from Judaism to Christianity, which was run by an ordained Warden and two

<sup>5</sup> Anne Bowtell, 'A Medieval London Hospital: Elsyngspital 1330 – 1536' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2010), p. 32.

chaplains and by the early fifteenth century was overseen by the Master of the Rolls; St James Westminster, a leper hospital which became an almshouse and in the early fifteenth century was administered by an ordained Master on behalf of the King; St Anthony of Vienne, which was financed by John Tate, a lay man; and St Mary Spital, which was an almshouse built by a hospital. Therefore, even though each of these five almshouses was ostensibly under the administration of a religious organisation, it also had a measure of lay involvement.

St James Westminster provides a good example of how this administration worked (or did not work) in a failing almshouse. Initially a leper hospital, administered by a religious fraternity with a master, the foundation of St James in Westminster was so corrupt by the early fourteenth century that the Abbot of Westminster tried to take it over. A visitation by the abbot in 1317 found that the hospital's affairs were ordered to the comfort of the Master and Prior (reportedly a rude drunkard), but to the distress of the other residents. Some of the sisters had illegally alienated the hospital's property in their wills, services were neglected, and a sister had to leave the hospital in disgrace.<sup>6</sup> New regulations put forward in 1322 reveal that there had been a collective and serious failure to confess and hear mass as required.<sup>7</sup> This was followed by a court case in 1340, where the Crown disputed the Abbot's right to patronage of the hospital. The court found in favour of the Crown.<sup>8</sup> In 1449 the hospital was bestowed by Henry VI on Eton College, at which point four alms sisters were resident. The hospital was forfeited back to the King in 1460, but by this time the hospital's reputation had been somewhat restored. Its advantageous geographical position and assets were appreciated by Henry VIII, who proceeded to build St James's Palace on the site. He allowed the alms women to remain until 1536, when they were turned out with a generous pension of £6 13s 4d.<sup>9</sup> This almshouse was poorly managed initially and changed administrators several times. Henry VIII appears to have placed little spiritual or charitable value on the institution, and on the eve of the Dissolution sequestered the property for his own uses. The reasons for the poor administration were not

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<sup>6</sup> Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, p. 302.

<sup>7</sup> BL, Cottonian MS Faustina A.III f. 321r

<sup>8</sup> Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, p. 305.

<sup>9</sup> *Calendar of Letters and Papers, Foreign and Domestic, Henry VIII*, J. S. Brewer, J. Gairdner, and R. H. Brodie eds., (London, 1864) X, no. 775 (1-4).

religious, but rather were caused by corruption and lack of accountability of individuals; a potential problem that was not confined to ecclesiastical hospitals and almshouses.

As we have seen, a petition was delivered to parliament in 1512 complaining about the poor administration of almshouses. The waning confidence of lay people in religious organisations' ability to administer almshouses seems to be borne out in the administrative choices of almshouse founders in London and Westminster. Under a quarter, four out of eighteen new foundations in the early sixteenth century, were given to religious organisations to administer (see figure 4.1 above), down from nearly half in the previous fifty years (1450-1499). Not a single almshouse in this period (1500-1549) was founded by a lay person and given to a religious organisation to administer. Two of the four almshouses run by religious institutions in the first half of the sixteenth century were entrusted to Westminster Abbey, a royal peculiar, to administer on behalf of the King, Henry VII, and the King's mother, Margaret Beaufort.<sup>10</sup> Thus they were effectively outside of the oversight of the Bishop. Both the other religious foundations, the almshouses of Holy Trinity and St Stephen's Westminster, were founded by monasteries. Therefore, these were founded by religious organisations who then also administered them in the long term. Both were suppressed during the Dissolution. The few almshouses administered by religious houses that survived the Dissolution included St Katharine's Almshouse, and King Henry VII's Almshouse at Westminster.<sup>11</sup>

Despite some effective administration, the almshouses run by religious organisations were mostly doomed to extinction by the Dissolution. Following the dissolution, Henry VIII refounded Westminster School, which was attached to Westminster Abbey. Elizabeth I confirmed this charter, continuing the long association of Kings with the Abbey, and established an almshouse attached to the school.<sup>12</sup> However, by the time of the Dissolution most new founders were looking to other administrative organisations and frameworks to tend their almshouses after their deaths.

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<sup>10</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 300, 307.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 302, 316, 314, 300.

<sup>12</sup> See Appendix One, p. 320.

As we have seen, the corruption and ultimate demise of St James' Almshouse was due to the behaviour of individuals from both lay and ecclesiastical backgrounds and, indeed, the behaviour of the residents themselves. However, eight out of nine lay founders of almshouses in London and Westminster in the early fifteenth century appeared to think that the best chance for the survival of their institutions was with the City companies (see figure 4.2 above).<sup>13</sup> The general mistrust of religious organisations in terms of their ability to administer an almshouse in a competent and accountable manner (in London and Westminster at least), was demonstrated by the two fifteenth-century petitions to parliament, examined in Chapter Three, lamenting the poor administration of hospitals and calling for reform.<sup>14</sup> Indeed it would appear that this assessment was correct in the long term. All eight of the almshouses founded by lay people in this period given to City companies to supervise survived, at least until the Great Fire of London in 1666 (over 200 years); the Vintners' Almshouse survived until 2013 and Whittington's Almshouse is still functioning, nearly 600 years later.

Kate Giles observed that the decision to found or administer an established almshouse could be a crucial step in the development of corporate identity.<sup>15</sup> The City companies seem to have been less successful in managing almshouses that they founded themselves. The Merchant Taylors' Almshouse (1413), the first company-founded almshouse in London, is also still operational but the Carpenters', Brewers', and Cutlers' early attempts to found and run an almshouse did not survive beyond the end of the fifteenth century. The Girdlers' almshouse, however, lasted until the Great Fire of London in 1666. It would appear, therefore, that the almshouses were more likely to survive in the long-term when they were gifted to a City company by an individual, to be administered in a way that was public and accountable, tied to a specific endowment and where the company would lose reputation if they were poorly managed. The almshouses started by the companies themselves were more informal communal arrangements without independent financial endowments for their support, and so, when times were hard, they were more susceptible to suggestions

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<sup>13</sup> Although there were ten lay almshouses founded, two of them were founded by Richard Whittington, hence nine lay founders.

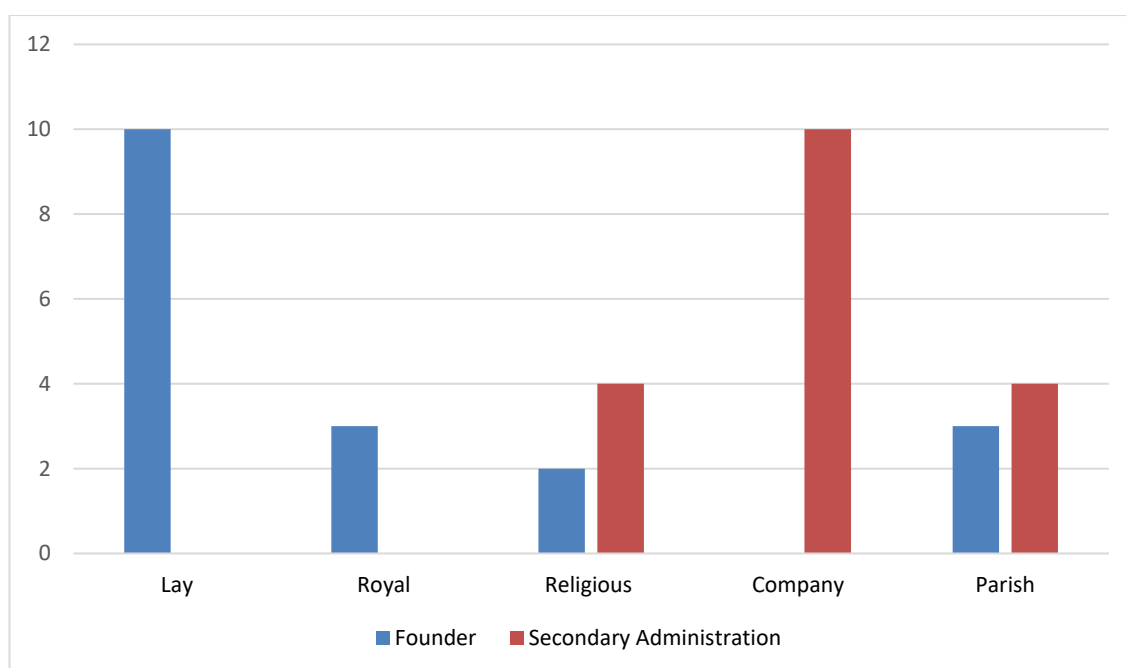
<sup>14</sup> See Chapter Three p. 113. For a more detailed discussion about the impact of these petitions.

<sup>15</sup> K. Giles, *An Archaeology of Social Identity: Guildhalls in York, c 1350-1630*, BAR, British Series, 315 (2000), p. 59.

that the rooms should be rented out to gain income, and were less likely to survive in the long term.

The preference for City company administration among lay founders continued during the early sixteenth century, when nine out of ten lay founders left their almshouses to be administered by a company (see figure 4.3 below). Dean John Colet reflected this consensus when he founded St Paul's School in 1512. It was traditional for ecclesiastical organisations to manage schools, but John Colet left St Paul's School to be managed by the Mercers' Company stating that he had: 'yet found the least corruption' in married laymen.<sup>16</sup> This trend even extended to royal patrons: when Henry VIII founded an almshouse in 1538 he apparently gave it to the Watermen's Company to administer. This was an unsurprising move given his troubled relationship with religious organisations, but a break with tradition all the same.

*Figure 4.3: Founder and Secondary Administration of New Almshouse foundations in London and Westminster 1500-1549*



The City companies were remarkably successful at keeping their almshouses operational through the Dissolution.<sup>17</sup> None of the company-administered almshouses

<sup>16</sup> George Coulton, *Medieval Panorama: The English Scene from Conquest to Reformation* (Cambridge, 1938), p. 659.

<sup>17</sup> C.J. Kitching, 'The Quest for Concealed Lands in the Reign of Elizabeth I,' *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 5<sup>th</sup> Ser., 24 (1974), pp. 63-78.

were shut down, and they were skilful at protecting the endowments that supported the almshouses from the King's coffers. The companies benefitted from the fact that the Abolition of the Chantries Act of 1547 was less punitive than the originally proposed Bill, which advocated seizing all the assets of fraternities and City companies.<sup>18</sup> The companies were wily about the way they approached the Chantry Commissioners' survey of revenues they held for 'superstitious' purposes; the Merchant Taylors took advice from the Recorder of London about what should be included in the report about their assets for funding 'priests, obits, lampes and lyghts.' They asked for an additional day to complete their return, and entertained the commissioners to a dinner at Merchant Taylors' Hall in the presence of the Lord Mayor.<sup>19</sup> The Merchant Taylors were required to pay £98 7s 11d to the Crown for twenty obits and nine priests in eleven parish churches. This was raised to £2,006 2s 6d after the companies were required to buy back their rents at twenty years' purchase, but their almshouse was not mentioned and survived.<sup>20</sup>

The Dissolution abruptly completed the long developing trend to lay and City company almshouse administration in London. Religious organisations, along with any almshouses associated with them that did not have powerful lay patrons (such as Henry VII's Almshouses and St Katharine's Almshouse), had been disbanded. Thirteen of the fourteen almshouses founded during the period 1550 to 1600 were founded by lay people and of these ten were given to City companies to administer (see figure 4.4 below). Of these all, bar two, are still operational in some form, but most have been amalgamated into other almshouse charities operated by the companies.

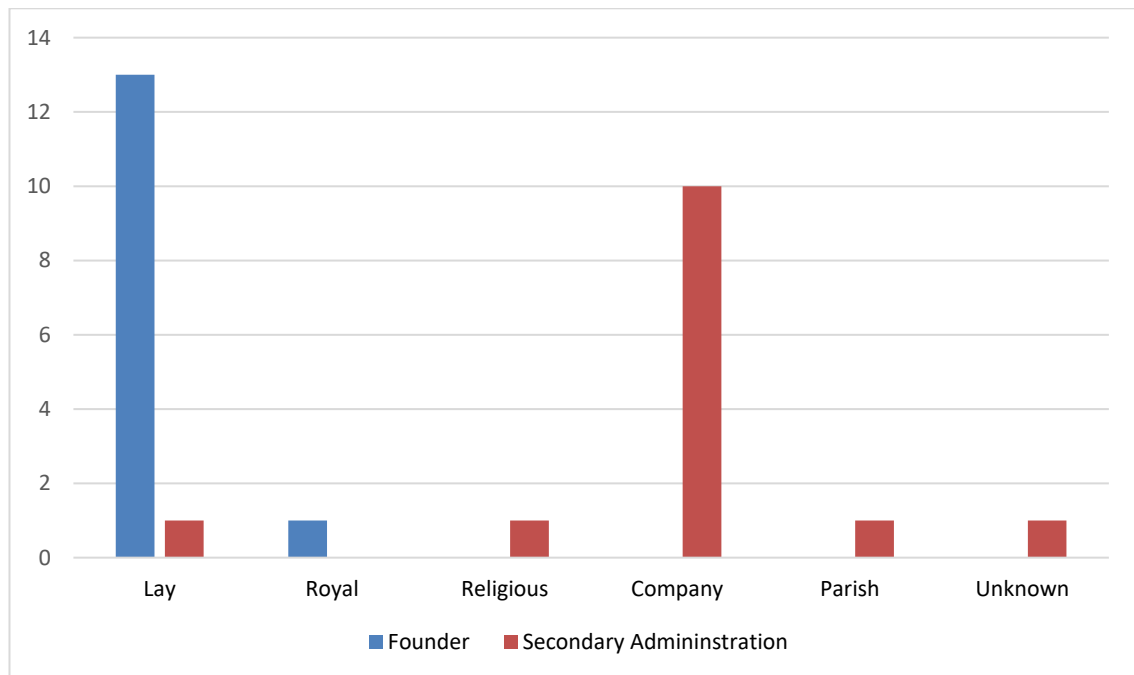
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<sup>18</sup> Davies, 'The Tailors of London and Their Guild', p. 64.

<sup>19</sup> Davies, 'The Tailors of London and Their Guild', p. 65.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

*Figure 4.4: Founder and Secondary Administration of New Almshouse foundations in London and Westminster 1550-1600*



The main differences between the endowment of religious and company-administered almshouses appear to be connected to the location of the properties that provided endowments in the form of rents for the maintenance of the almshouses. The City companies-administered almshouses tended to be endowed with property previously owned by the founder and local to the almshouse. In contrast almshouses committed to religious organisations tended to be financed by manors, farms, and property outside of the City, following the practice of the older large medieval hospitals. For example, St Stephen's Almshouse was endowed by John Chamber, a dean of the college of St Stephen and physician to Henry VIII, for eight poor people.<sup>21</sup> The almshouse was supported by rents from properties in Middlesex, Surrey and Norfolk, and the Chantry Commissioners estimated that the property was worth £64 per annum in 1548, when it was dissolved, whereas Henry Barton's Almshouse was exclusively endowed with property within the City of London.<sup>22</sup>

There were further differences in the financing of religious and company-administered almshouses relating to additional donations left to the almshouse foundation. The

<sup>21</sup> Kitching, *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, 190.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid; see Henry Barton's Almshouse, Appendix One, p. 301.



older medieval hospitals tended to accrue bequests associated with intercession for the dead. People asked to be buried in the hospital chapel and left money to be remembered in intercessions for the dead and chantry Masses, to ease their path and the path of their loved ones, through purgatory.<sup>23</sup> This rarely occurred in almshouses administered by City companies; bequests were few, but when they occurred, they usually involved alms for the residents. One or two bequests of this nature were left to the residents of both Whittington's Almshouse and Henry Barton's Almshouse in the fifteenth century.<sup>24</sup> In the sixteenth century Sir George Barnes left his lease of a windmill in Finsbury to the Haberdashers' Company for the benefit of the poor dwelling in the Company Almshouse, in his will dated 15 February 1557. The Haberdashers rented the windmill for 2s 6d per annum and sub-let it for £6 13s 4d per annum, which enabled the ten almspeople to be paid an additional 2s each per quarter.<sup>25</sup> This form of additional bequest was rare in the mid-sixteenth century, but became virtually unknown as the sixteenth century progressed, perhaps because of the concern that the bequests could be seen as intercession for the dead and were therefore not appropriate following the Dissolution.

During the 200 years from the first almshouses given to City companies to administer the companies proved themselves worthy of the founders' trust, going to great lengths to secure the future of the almshouses in their care. However, during this time lay people in London and Westminster also began to experiment with other ways of administering almshouses.

Thomas Cook was the first layman in London to leave his almshouse to his family to administer after his death in 1478.<sup>26</sup> He established an almshouse during his lifetime in Black Alley, All Hallows, London Wall.<sup>27</sup> But there does not appear to be any evidence of the almshouse continuing beyond his death. The dearth of almshouses administered by lay people in London in the fifteenth century is in stark contrast to the pattern found by Elaine Phillips in East Anglia, who suggested that most post-1450 almshouses

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<sup>23</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 52-68.

<sup>24</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 321, 301.

<sup>25</sup> *Endowed Charities*, p. 476.

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Beaumont's Will, TNA PROB 11/4/179 ff. 69r-71v; Sir Thomas Cook's will TNA PROB 11/6/467 (36 Wattys)

<sup>27</sup> Anne Wethers' Will, TNA PROB 11/31/716.

were founded by lay people, who placed the administration into the hands of relatives or executors after their deaths.<sup>28</sup> The reason for this disparity is probably due to the diligence in the administration of almshouses of the mercantile elite and companies of the City of London, a subject to which we will return later.

However, in the second half of the sixteenth century (see figure 4.4 above), a second lay-administered almshouse was founded in Westminster. Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse (Emmanuel Hospital), established in 1595, was given to family executors to administer after her death. Lady Anne Dacre left £300 for building the hospital and school plus £2,000 and 3,000 acres of land in Yorkshire, which was let for 100 years at £100 per annum for the maintenance of the charity.<sup>29</sup> Despite this generous endowment there was initially only enough money to build the almshouse. However, in 1736 a school was finally established, which then became the focus of the charity. Today the charity continues to function in the form of the school, but the almshouse has been lost.

Lay-administered almshouses, therefore, had a difficult genesis in London and Westminster, perhaps due to the evident success and experience demonstrated by the City companies. These were the preferred recipients and safe-guarders of individual's charitable aspirations. They were effective managers of complex multifaceted charitable foundations that often accompanied almshouse foundation (see Chapter Three), and could include schools, intercession for the dead, and other alms. Other reasons for the bias might be found in the survival of records. The City companies kept records, especially of land-holdings and endowments, bequests and contracts. I have found evidence of one small lay administered almshouse in wills, but, given that these establishments were often founded during the lifetime of the founder rather than as a deathbed bequest, it may be that there were many more and the records have been lost. Indeed, Patricia Cullum suggested that most lay founded almshouses or *maisonsdieu* were expressly established for the short term and that our perception

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<sup>28</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 127.

<sup>29</sup> LMA: CLA/071/AD 01 -03.

that there were very few of them is due to the disproportionate prominence of wealthy long lived institutions in the documentary record.<sup>30</sup>

The situation in Westminster was different to the City of London: the City companies did not have such an established, civic presence within Westminster, due in no small part to the presence of the palace of Westminster.<sup>31</sup> Civic authority was muted in comparison with the power of Westminster Abbey and the other established religious institutions. It would appear that the people of Westminster turned to traditional sources of authority; the Church, and parish, to administer almshouse foundations until after the Dissolution, when Lady Anne Dacre established her almshouse with a lay administration.

Another group of almshouses that retained ecclesiastical administration was the parish almshouses. The funding sources of parish almshouses, almshouses founded for the poor of a specific parish and administered by the parish, during this period are difficult to ascertain.<sup>32</sup> The only remaining records of the pre-Dissolution parish almshouses in London and Westminster are found in the Chantry Certificates and (for Whittington's Longhouse) Ward Mote records and Court of Aldermen records. Other than suggesting the parish almshouses were endowed with the rents from another property in the parish, the records do not provide much detail on how they were administered.<sup>33</sup>

Two of the four parish almshouses in this study were multifunctional. Whittington's Longhouse consisted of six almshouses built over 120 latrines on the bank of the Thames for the poor of St Martin Vintry parish, and St Clement Danes' Almshouse consisted of a room in the churchyard 'built at parishioners' expense with under-rooms let to the poor rent free.'<sup>34</sup> In Kensington the Chantry Commissioners referred to a Church house which was let to the poor 'of the sufferance of the parishioners'.<sup>35</sup> The administration of the parish almshouse at St Michael Cornhill was even more opaque.

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<sup>30</sup> Patricia Cullum, 'For Pore People Harberles': What was the function of the Maisonsdieu?', in D. J. Clayton, Richard G. Davies and Peter McNiven eds., *Trade, Devotion and Governance, Papers in Later Medieval History* (Stroud, 1994) p. 37.

<sup>31</sup> G. Rosser, 'The Essence of Medieval Urban Communities: The Vill of Westminster 1200-1540', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 34 (1984) pp. 91-112.

<sup>32</sup> For a longer discussion about parish almshouses see Chapter Three, pp. 130-2.

<sup>33</sup> P. E. Jones, 'Whittington's Longhouse', *London Topographical Record*, Vol. 23 (1972) p. 28.

<sup>34</sup> Kitching ed., *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, 152.

<sup>35</sup> Kitching ed., *London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, 154.

John Stow recorded that Richard Yaxley, Doctor of Physic to Henry VIII, had built 'proper houses' for members of the Choir and when the Choir was dissolved the lodgings were given to 'ancient decayed parishioners'.<sup>36</sup> However, there is no specific mention of an almshouse in the parish accounts for St Michael Cornhill, perhaps because it was a temporary arrangement and the residents were not required to pay rent. But there are references to houses in the churchyard which were initially rented out, and of payments to the poor of the churchyard and repairs to buildings in the churchyard. A building in Silver Street was also left for the use of the poor, all of which indicates that the parish was supporting poor people living in buildings in the Churchyard, which may have been an informal almshouse.<sup>37</sup>

After the Dissolution Anne Wethers left five almshouses in 1547 endowed with property in London to a capital value of £230.<sup>38</sup> When she died she left a thirteen-year-old son as her heir, the property was said to be worth £9 per annum, and was held by the King in service of a tenth part of a knight's fee; no further record can be found relating to the fate of her almshouse.<sup>39</sup> Later, in 1577, Cornelius Van Dun founded two almshouses in Westminster for local widows, which were also administered by the parish.<sup>40</sup>

These six parish almshouses show two different approaches to administration. Whittington's Longhouse and St Clement Danes', Anne Wethers' and Cornelius Van Dun's almshouses demonstrate purposeful intent by parishioners and benefactors. A plan was made, funds were raised (though there is sometimes no indication of where these funds came from) and an almshouse was built. It seems reasonable to suggest that any necessary repairs to the buildings were found communally, or individually, by the parishioners, and that if money for repairs was not found, the buildings gradually

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<sup>36</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 181.

<sup>37</sup> W. H. Overall ed., *The Accounts of the Churchwardens of the Parish of St Michael, Cornhill, in the City of London, from 1456 to 1608. With miscellaneous memoranda continued in the great book of accounts, and extracts from the proceedings of the Vestry, from 1563 to 1607* (1871) pp. 19, 62, 100, 147, 229, 244, 247, 253. The houses in the Churchyard were rented out between 1548 – 1560; when records of rental cease after this time it appears that the houses were used flexibly as required by the parish, including use for the poor.

<sup>38</sup> Anne Wethers' Will: TNA PROB 11/31/716 p. 3; Jordan, *Charities*, p. 140.

<sup>39</sup> E. A. Fry ed., *Abstracts of Inquisitiones post mortem, London 1577-1603* (London, 1908) I, p.100.

<sup>40</sup> Cornelius Van Dun's almshouses were administered by the parish of St Margaret Westminster until 1850. See Appendix One, p.293.

decayed. The important point seems to be that the parishioners, or benefactor in the case of Whittington's Longhouse, Anne Wethers' and Cornelius Van Dun, intended an almshouse to function in the parish for the use of the local poor. The second approach, demonstrated by St Michael Cornhill, and Kensington parishes, involves more informal arrangements. It would appear that property owned by the parish had become vacant and the poor were allowed to use it for as long as it was convenient to the parish. In these cases, the almshouse was incidental, or perhaps convenient, temporary, and less formal.

The Ilchester almshouse, though outside London and Westminster in the county of Somerset, demonstrates how an early parish almshouse might come into being. It was founded by Robert Veel in 1426. It was left to be administered by the village bailiff and overseen by a group of lay trustees. The bailiff was to render an account of receipts and expenditure to the coroner, constable and six of the most respectable inhabitants of the town every year. The bailiffs were paid 13s 4d per year for their trouble.<sup>41</sup> Robert Veel's financial and legal arrangements included yearly public accountability for the charity by townspeople, who could be said to have a personal interest in keeping the charity functioning properly, with no one person left in a position to personally gain from it. None of these early yearly accounts appears to have survived, so we do not know how the charity was administered on a day-to-day basis in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. However, yet again the foundations appear to have provided multiple functions for the parish with the upper rooms being variously used as a chapel, school, and parish meeting rooms.

These parish almshouses appear much more flexible, transitory, and simple than the better financed and more elaborate institutions administered by City companies and religious organisations. Their administration is opaque, but it seems reasonable to suggest that it was simple. The church wardens were probably responsible for the administration, and the financial burden was probably limited to urgent repairs to the fabric of the buildings or the distribution of the occasional bequest from a parishioner.

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<sup>41</sup> Buckler, *Ilchester Almshouse Deeds*, pp. 114-116.

In the next section we will examine the factors that promoted the longevity of almshouses.

As discussed at the beginning of this chapter there are various ways to measure the success of an institution, but, owing to the scarcity of their records between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, longevity seems the most reliable measure of administrative success available. Longevity implies that an institution has been resilient, adaptable to changing circumstances and that successive generations have valued its existence enough to make the effort to keep it going. It implies a continuing perception of value to the institution and community it serves, and ongoing pride in its existence.<sup>42</sup>

There are, however, several problems relating to using longevity as an indication of success relating specifically to the London and Westminster almshouses of this era. The first of these, the Dissolution, resulted in the forced closure of ten religious and parish almshouses, several of which would have survived much longer if not for this event (see figure 4.5 below). The second extinction event, which solely affected almshouses in the City of London, was the Great Fire of London of 1666, which destroyed many almshouses, at least seven of which were not rebuilt. Those almshouses that survived these two cataclysms tended to enjoy a long life, many surviving to the nineteenth century and beyond.

*Figure 4.5: The closure date of early almshouses 1330 - 2018*



<sup>42</sup> For further discussion regarding honour and almshouses see Chapter Seven, pp. 269-271.

Despite these issues the longevity of some of the almshouse institutions founded during the period of this study is impressive. Fourteen almshouses of the fifty-two founded between 1330 and 1600 still exist in some form. Of these, one, St Katharine's, is still administered by a religious organisation. The other thirteen are run by the Livery Companies of London. Some of these almshouses, such as Whittington's Almshouse, remain as standalone institutions; these have often gone through several buildings and locations, but have endured through the centuries. Others have been amalgamated with other almshouses. Another group has been absorbed into the general charitable trust of the administrative organisation, but its investments remain to support the poor and needy.

There appear to have been four main factors that influenced these almshouses' ability to survive long-term during the medieval and Tudor periods: adequate financial provision, formal legal status, competent and accountable administration, including regular accounting and reporting, and, perhaps most importantly of all, perceived value to the administrators. The Countess of Kent's Almshouse demonstrates most of these factors.

The Countess of Kent covenanted with the Clothworkers' Company to administer her almshouse in Whitefriars in 1537. In 1527 she began renting property at Whitefriars and established the almshouse, in which she lived, with the almswomen and a gatekeeper.<sup>43</sup> In 1537 the endowment comprised £350 and four tenements in Queenhithe, and one tenement in Fenchurch Street. To put this into context, Christopher Dyer found that during the late-fifteenth and early-sixteenth centuries only two York Merchants left more than £300 to their beneficiaries.<sup>44</sup> The Countess of Kent also covenanted to pay £15 per annum during her life and £18 per annum after her death to provide weekly payments of 7s 6d to seven almswomen. The almshouses were built on the site of the Friary Scholars Garden (called the Coke), adjacent to the Countess's residence, and they came to the Clothworkers' Company with a 99-year lease at a rent of 10s per annum.<sup>45</sup> The almshouse was moved to Islington in 1770 and

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<sup>43</sup> Holder, *The Medieval Friaries of London*, p. 110.

<sup>44</sup> Christopher Dyer, *Making a Living in the Middle Ages: The People of Britain 850-1520* (London, 2009) p. 303.

<sup>45</sup> CCA, CL/G/Charity/Kent/A/1 Title Copy Deed of Trust 1537.

amalgamated with another Clothworkers' Almshouse. Today it forms part of the Clothworkers' charitable foundation.<sup>46</sup> The Countess of Kent left regulations for the management of the almshouse and the support of the almswomen. The endowment for the Countess of Kent's Almshouse was adequate but not lavish when compared to the endowment left by Henry Barton or Richard Whittington 100 years earlier.<sup>47</sup> Adequate endowments were vital to ensure an almshouse's longevity and lack of funds was a prime cause of an almshouse's demise. Thomas Cook, for example, left no endowments to support his small almshouse in Black Alley in 1478, and there is no evidence it was ever maintained by his family as he wished.<sup>48</sup>

The Countess of Kent's Almshouse had a formal legal status by way of an indenture and a deed of trust with the Clothworkers' Company. These legally obliged the company to maintain the almshouses in perpetuity following her directions.<sup>49</sup> The deed of trust also included information about what was to happen on her death and where she was to be buried. These legal documents are evidence of the careful planning on the part of the Countess, to ensure the longevity of the institution. Foundation documents and other legal methods of binding the secondary administrative organisation to its commitment to maintain the almshouse were part of a successful strategy, along with occasionally providing external overseers to ensure the institution was maintained as the founder wished, with financial penalties for non-compliance. In the sixteenth century almshouse founders went further and some began to include penalties for the failure of companies to administer their almshouses in the manner expected. For example, in 1551 Dame Elizabeth Mory's will stipulated that her almshouse was to be administered by the masters and wardens of the Bridge House and the Armourers' Company and their successors. They were to search and view the almshouse's property yearly and decide whether repairs had been carried out and everything was done properly according to Dame Elizabeth's will. If either the master and wardens of Bridge House or the Wardens of the Armourers' failed to perform the conditions of the will then her executors should enter the property, and

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<sup>46</sup> *Endowed Charities*, pp. 179-181.

<sup>47</sup> See Appendix One, p. 293, 301, 321.

<sup>48</sup> Sir Thomas Cook's will TNA, PROB 11/6/467 (36 Wattys).

<sup>49</sup> CCA, CL/G/Charity/Kent/A/1: Title Copy Deed of Trust 1537; CL/Estate/5/1A/5, Indenture between the Clothworkers' Company and Margaret, Countess of Kent, 14 July 1538.



within three months sell it and distribute the proceeds for poor maidens' marriages and for the relief of the poor.<sup>50</sup>

Almshouses that failed to survive often lacked legal status. Early attempts by the Brewers' and Girdlers' to establish an almshouse were initially successful. Almspeople were given rooms within the company hall compound, but the arrangement was informal and soon the rooms were felt to be more profitable as tenements and the almshouse function gradually disappeared.<sup>51</sup> Neither of these almshouses had a formal legal status, they were ad hoc practical solutions to the problems of poverty that faced some of their members in the short term. However successful they were in terms of relieving poverty; their existence was not supported legally and so the administration was easily persuaded that it was more profitable to rent out the rooms used by the almspeople.

After the Countess of Kent's death, the Clothworkers' Company kept accounts and records relating to the almshouse and administered it successfully. The craft and mercantile companies of London were in an excellent position to provide the quality of reliable, competent, and accountable administration that enabled the survival of an almshouse. Their administrative skills included the keeping of records and accounts. The companies were semi-democratic institutions run by and for their members, whose officials depended on the trust and goodwill of the members for their appointment. Members also relied on the companies to support them in times of need and to help their families after their deaths. The companies were so successful at running almshouses in London that there was no need for founders to go to the trouble of setting up other bodies such as trusts. Many lay founders were citizens of London and were either members of a City company or associated with one. It was therefore easy for them to turn to the companies to manage their almshouse, an organisation to which they owed some measure of allegiance, with the added bonus that they would enhance their own reputation with the gift. The companies were not only reliable for managing almshouse foundations, they were also proved to be

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<sup>50</sup> *Endowed Charities*, p. 312.

<sup>51</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 292, 299.

trustworthy with the management of wider charitable and chantry foundations of which almshouses were often a part.

Legal agreements and competent administration were important for the continued existence of an almshouse, but their ultimate survival depended to a great extent on their perceived value to the members of the administrative organisation. The Clothworkers' Company took great care of the Countess of Kent's almshouse, surveying it annually and completing regular repairs. They also went to the trouble of buying the property when the ninety-nine year lease expired.<sup>52</sup> The charitable activity of the Clothworkers and the other livery companies of London was central to their conception of themselves and their reputations as merchants. The almshouses and almspeople were a visible reminder that the City companies looked after their members and were honourable and trustworthy guardians of bequests. Today when the City companies' role in the regulation of their trades in London has diminished, their charitable role remains their core activity.

Across the four different varieties of almshouse administration (lay, company, religious and parish), there appear to be some key factors that favour the survival of the institution in the long term. Foundation documents and other legal methods of binding the administering organisation to its commitment to maintain the almshouse seem successful, along with providing external overseers to ensure the institution was maintained as the founder wished, together with financial penalties for non-compliance. The amount of the financial endowment of the institution, while essential, was not the only determinant of long-term survival. Careful and accountable administration of resources and prolonged financial and emotional commitment to the institution are better markers of long-term success. In this way the City companies proved excellent custodians for almshouse institutions.

## 4.2 European Comparisons

In order to understand the emergence of almshouses in London and Westminster they need to be placed in a wider context in terms of the emergence of similar institutions in other parts of England and Europe. This will involve an analysis of the structure of

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<sup>52</sup> CCA, Court Orders, CL/B/1/9, f. 50v, Company appointees to purchase Whitefriars, 5 July 1654.

the city and the organisation of welfare in London, Norwich, Bruges, and Florence, (as there exists published research on hospitals in each of these towns), followed by a comparison of the organisation, foundation and administration of almshouses and other specialised hospitals in those cities.

The City of London originally comprised a square mile of land bounded by Roman walls and the river Thames. By the late-Middle Ages, it had grown to include areas just outside the City walls, was divided into 110 parishes and boasted a busy port. Estimates suggest that the population in 1300 within the City walls was around 80,000, a level that declined markedly in the fourteenth century following successive outbreaks of plague, when possibly 48 per cent of the population may have died and was not achieved again until around the mid sixteenth century.<sup>53</sup> By 1500 London had developed a sophisticated system of civic government which regulated the urban environment. It shared these responsibilities in what Caroline Barron described as a 'customary and ad hoc' fashion with the Crown, City companies, fraternities, and individual citizens. By the late sixteenth century the City of London contained six hospitals, six *leprosaria* and at least forty-two almshouses.<sup>54</sup>

Norwich was the second largest city in England in the late-Middle Ages, with forty parish churches and a busy port. Norwich had a smaller population than the City of London, of between 5,000 and 10,000 people in the late eleventh-century, which had grown slightly to around 11,000 in the mid-sixteenth century.<sup>55</sup> The governance of the city was similar to that of London with a mayor (from 1404) and court of aldermen, elected by freemen of the city. The medieval city of Norwich contained five hospitals, four almshouses and six *leprosaria* (most of which had become almshouses by the late-sixteenth century).<sup>56</sup> Given that the population of Norwich at this point was approximately one tenth of the size of London, the provision of hospitals and almshouses appears to be in proportion with the lower population. However, Carole Rawcliffe found that the number of almshouses in English towns and cities was not

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<sup>53</sup> Derek Keene, 'A New Study of London Before the Great Fire', *Urban History Yearbook 1984* (Leicester, 1984), pp.11-21; Harding, 'The Population of London, 1550-1700', pp. 111-128.

<sup>54</sup> Barron and Davies, *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*.

<sup>55</sup> Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, pp. 5, 9.

<sup>56</sup> Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, p. 3.

related to local population rates as much as dissatisfaction with existing charitable institutions.<sup>57</sup> Therefore, in towns such as York or Bristol, where locals felt strongly about the mismanagement of local hospitals, more almshouses were founded.

In 1330 the city of Bruges had a population of approximately 37,000 divided into nine parishes initially under the rule of the Count of Flanders. The government of the city was organised by the Lords of the Law, consisting of burgomasters, aldermen and city councillors.<sup>58</sup> Valentin Vermeersch identified twenty-two almshouses in the city founded between the fourteenth and sixteenth centuries, but this may be an underestimate as there has been little direct investigation into the origins of the medieval foundations in Bruges.<sup>59</sup> Other charitable establishments included possibly three hospitals and at least one *leprosarium*. The proportions of hospitals and specialised hospitals to the population of the city in Bruges is broadly comparable with the City of London.

The medieval city of Florence was more directly comparable to London in terms of population. Originally a Roman city, by the late-Middle Ages it was a city state, ostensibly a republic and after 1532 it became a hereditary duchy ruled by a Medici Duke. However, despite the power of the Medici family, local neighbourhoods within Florence maintained a degree of independence until the middle of the fifteenth century. By the thirteenth century there were around thirty-six parishes in Florence and by the fourteenth century it had developed a large number of confraternities and guilds, which were dedicated to the worship of God and the 'Common Good'. In the fifteenth century these confraternities and guilds had established over thirty-three hospitals of varying function and size. That appears to be slightly less than the total available in the City of London, but the Florentine hospitals were more medically advanced and on a much larger scale.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?' pp.7-8.

<sup>58</sup> James M. Murray, *Bruges Cradle of Capitalism 1280-1390* (Cambridge, 2005), p. 86; Jan Dumolyn, "'Our land is only founded on trade and industry.'" Economic discourses in fifteenth-century Bruges', *Journal of Medieval History*, 36. 4 (2010) p. 378.

<sup>59</sup> Jan Dumolyn, 'Economic Development, Social Space and Political Power', in Hannah Skoda, Patrick Lantschner, R. L. J. Shaw eds., *Contact and exchange in later medieval Europe: Essays in Honour of Malcolm Vale* (Martlesham, 2012), pp. 33-57; Valentin Vermeersch, *Steden in Europa - Brugge* (Bruges, 2002), pp. 196-197.

<sup>60</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 25.

The provision of medical care, food, shelter, and clothing to people who were old, sick, poor or incapable was mediated in these four cities by faith and the doctrines of the Catholic Church, particularly those relating to charity. However, the expression of these ideas was different in each city with the biggest contrasts apparent between northern European cities of London, Norwich, Bruges, and the southern European city of Florence.

Late medieval systems of social welfare were varied across Europe. The large number of parishes in London (110) and the geographically localised nature of the City companies and fraternities resulted in a fragmented approach to charity and social welfare that was primarily dictated by the founder's piety and personal connection with a particular community. Bruges boasted a more centralised approach to the management of social welfare, with the welfare of citizens being the responsibility of the town magistracy.<sup>61</sup> The magistracy managed the city's response to famine and disease and was also responsible for generalised support of specific groups, such as orphans and the town's larger hospitals.

The parish poor tables of Bruges provided alms for the 'house poor', those who had a house, but still lived in poverty.<sup>62</sup> The poor tables were administered by the poor-table masters and financed by merchants, retailers and craftsmen within the city. Bruges had far fewer parishes than London, despite its comparable size, nine compared to 110 in the City of London therefore the amounts collected for the poor table in each parish could be substantially larger. Andrew Brown found that smaller specialised institutions for the poor and elderly began to appear in Bruges in the fourteenth century. Eight were founded before 1350 and five more between 1360 and 1370, and a further eleven in the fifteenth century.<sup>63</sup> Craft guilds were involved in these foundations, which were broadly comparable to the City companies' almshouses in London. The almshouses tended to be for women or widows, usually with the stipulation that they had led a good or honourable life.<sup>64</sup> Other potential residents of almshouses were

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<sup>61</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 201.

<sup>62</sup> Peter Stabel, Jeroen Puttevils, Jan Dumolyn, Bart Lambert, James M Murray and Guy Dupont, 'Production, Markets and Socio-economic Structures II c.1320-1500', in Andrew Brown, Jan Dumolyn eds., *Medieval Bruges: c. 850-1550* (Cambridge, 2018), p. 263.

<sup>63</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, pp. 197, 200.

<sup>64</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 202.

poor priests, the old, and members of certain families or craft guilds.<sup>65</sup> The residents of almshouses in Bruges did not follow a religious rule, but they followed a life of contemplation and intercession.<sup>66</sup> Bruges also contained some smaller tertiary houses, mostly for women. The magistracy was responsible for the oversight of these institutions.<sup>67</sup>

At first sight there is little similarity between the foundation of almshouses in London, Norwich and Bruges and hospitals in Florence. Florence benefited from a city-wide perspective when considering charitable responses to the problems of health and poverty, and thought carefully about the priorities for charitable intervention. John Henderson found that the Confraternity of *Orsanmichele* was aware of the widespread endemic poverty and episodic poverty linked to the life-cycle before the outbreak of the Black Death, but as they had a limited budget, they prioritised help for respectable people. This was achieved by requiring recipients of alms to possess a fixed address within the city, so they had a specific location to deliver assistance to and could learn about the moral integrity of the recipient.<sup>68</sup> They also prioritised help to working families, followed by orphans and widows with dependent children, rather than the elderly, impotent and destitute. Some central, state organisation existed which focussed on maintaining an affordable price for wheat for poorer families, but also other provision, including works of mercy – food, alms, and hospital care for the acutely sick. Hospitals were efficiently run by private charitable institutions and cared for those with curable illnesses and the young in preference to those with long-term incurable or terminal conditions.<sup>69</sup>

Florence enjoyed rapid growth in the number of hospitals between 1250 and 1349 and at the same time there was increasing specialisation of their function. The specialised hospitals included a hospital for people suffering from St Anthony's fire (ergotism), leprosy hospitals, hospitals for the acute sick, hospitals for orphans and three small hospitals to provide sickness support and long-term shelter for the impotent and aged

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<sup>65</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 207.

<sup>66</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 209.

<sup>67</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 202.

<sup>68</sup> Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, p. 272.

<sup>69</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, pp. 16, 17.

founded by artisan groups.<sup>70</sup> Professional guilds were beginning to be established from the early thirteenth century in many Italian cities. Craft guilds in Northern Europe and London began to emerge from religious fraternities in the fourteenth century, eventually becoming City companies.<sup>71</sup> Specialisation of hospitals was also happening across Northern Europe, and in both Norwich and London at this date. Leprosy hospitals started to appear just outside the city walls in London in the early twelfth century.<sup>72</sup> Queen Matilda founded St Giles' Leper Hospital at Holborn in 1118.<sup>73</sup> St Mary Bethlehem hospital in London was founded in 1247 and had principally become an asylum for 'lunatics' by 1403.<sup>74</sup> Almshouses, as specialist institutions for the impotent poor and elderly, began to be founded in London from 1330.<sup>75</sup> Elaine Phillips's 2001 survey of almshouses in Norfolk and Suffolk found that their foundation was extensive in this region. The first almshouse style institutions she identified were built in Norwich: God's House in 1292 and Garzorn Almshouse was built between 1300 and 1349.<sup>76</sup> Hospitals were first established in Bruges in the thirteenth century for the poor sick and travellers. During the fourteenth century new foundations in Bruges began to specialise and small almshouses were built. The Broker's Guild founded a chapel and almshouse in 1327 and almshouse foundation increased after 1360.<sup>77</sup>

Specialisation of institutions was occurring concurrently throughout this period across Europe, from Bruges to Norwich, London and Florence, but rather than following or copying a pattern demonstrated by other states, the form of the specialised institution was dictated by local needs, politics, culture and traditions.

Florentine artisans' hospitals and hospitals for widows bear the closest similarity to the almshouses of London, Norwich, and Bruges. The artisans' hospitals were for members of the craft who were too old or impotent to work and were without family assistance.

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<sup>70</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, pp. 15, 16, 49.

<sup>71</sup> Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 206.

<sup>72</sup> Honeybourne, 'The Leper Hospitals of the London Area', pp. 1-61.

<sup>73</sup> Marjorie Honeybourne, 'The Hospital of St. Giles-in-the-Fields, Holborn' in Caroline Barron, Matthew Davies eds., *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex* (London, 2007), p. 175.

<sup>74</sup> M. Reddan, 'The Hospital of St Mary Bethlehem' in Barron and Davies, *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, p. 114.

<sup>75</sup> See Elsyngspital, Appendix One, p. 297.

<sup>76</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', Appendix A pp. iii, xxiv, xxv, xxviii.

<sup>77</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 197. Vermeersch, *Steden in Europa* pp. 196-197.

The earliest of these institutions, the *Spedale di S. Onofrio de' Tintori*, which was founded in 1280 for retired dyers, orphans of guild members and temporary accommodation for the poor. It had capacity for around twelve individuals and was overseen by a priest.<sup>78</sup> Several hospitals for women in Florence also accepted long-term residents. One of these, the *Spedale delle Devote della Vergine Maria*, founded in 1403 by the *Laudessi* confraternity of S. Agnese, catered for seven women aged between 25 and 80 who were either sick or elderly.<sup>79</sup> Also the *Orbatello* established a hostel in 1372 that housed 100 widows.<sup>80</sup>

It would appear that almshouse foundation was diverse even between Northern European cities such as Bruges and London. In Bruges, unlike London, almshouse foundation declined in the sixteenth century. Both Bruges and London had almshouses founded by guilds or companies, but the long-term administration of almshouses in Bruges was more likely to be in the hands of boards of trustees, whereas the City companies were the preferred administrators for London foundations. In London, Bruges and Florence the guilds and companies played a significant role in civic government, and, due to their growing wealth, they were economically equipped to take on the long-term administration of almshouse-type institutions. However, the Florentine hospitals for the elderly and widows diverged from those of Bruges or London in their built form.

Almshouses in London, Norwich, and Bruges usually provided individual houses for residents, shared by single people or married couples. These were generally small, sometimes a single room or two rooms, often in the form of individual houses, a row of houses or a number of small houses built around a courtyard (a subject discussed in more detail in Chapter Seven).<sup>81</sup> The almshouses of Bruges had two distinct forms, *cameren* (rooms in a hall) and *hofjes* (almshouses built around a court).<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>78</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 345.

<sup>79</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 45.

<sup>80</sup> Ibid.

<sup>81</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 239-246. Auke Rijpma, 'Funding Public Services Through Religious and Charitable Foundations in the Late Medieval Low Countries' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Utrecht, 1982), pp. 38-39.

<sup>82</sup> Rijpma, 'Funding Public Services Through Religious and Charitable Foundations in the Late Medieval Low Countries', p. 40.



The artisans' confraternities of Florence tended to found hospitals in residential areas of the city close to their settlements.<sup>83</sup> However, these early small foundations for guild members had a different architecture to English almshouses. Henderson described the format of a typical small Florentine artisan hospital in the early fifteenth century as: 'a house for the *spedalingo* [head or warden of the hospital], a small chapel and a room where poor members of their trade could sleep.'<sup>84</sup> The artisan hospitals were typically designed to accommodate around six people and, in contrast to the City of London, there were very few of them; only four were represented in the *Castato* returns (a declaration of assets and expenses) of 1427-30 in Florence.<sup>85</sup>

Later fifteenth-century hospitals for widows in Florence bear some resemblance to almshouses in London. Several small hospitals for women accepted long-term residents, like the *Spedale delle Devote della Vergine Maria*.<sup>86</sup> Also several women's hostels bore a resemblance to almshouses: the *Orbatello*, established in 1372, was very large and housed 100 women, most of whom were widows, two to a room with a kitchen shared between two rooms. The *Orbatello* just provided free accommodation; the women had to go out and earn or beg money for food.<sup>87</sup> This has some similarities with Elsyngspital in the City of London, an early hybrid between a hospital and an almshouse that was founded in 1330. However, Elsyngspital was unique in the City of London and Westminster in that it expected its residents to beg for food. All the later almshouse foundations in London provided individual accommodation, often with a pension, and sometimes with food and fuel. These establishments more closely resemble the almshouses of Bruges.

The attitude to the residents of almshouses or smaller hospitals (in the case of Florence) also diverged across national lines. The city of Bruges demonstrated a clear bias towards helping the 'house poor' or 'shame-faced poor'; those who had a house but still lived in poverty.<sup>88</sup> These were the respectable, rather than the destitute poor. Several of the poor tables established almshouses for the elderly residents, who could

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<sup>83</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 15.

<sup>84</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 44.

<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 45.

<sup>87</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 46.

<sup>88</sup> Stabel, et al, 'Production, Markets and Socio-economic Structures II c.1320-1500', p. 263.

no longer afford their houses, with a strong preference for supporting poor widows' of the parish.<sup>89</sup> However, once a recipient had established that they were 'shame-faced' there seems to have been a measure of respect towards them from the administrators of the almshouses.

By contrast, the residents of almshouses in London had a clear role providing spiritual charity towards the founder, the founder's family, the guild, company, or religious organisation that assisted them and, importantly, each other. Almspeople were both the recipients and instigators of charity, praying for the founders and each other, serving each other through sickness and health, living in charitable community with one another and participating in a perpetual round of prayer and praise.<sup>90</sup> This conferred on the almspeople a measure of respect within the communities they served and enabled them to heal their souls and prepare for death.

The attitude to the recipients of charity in Florence was quite different. The poor in Florence were often portrayed as passive recipients and the provision of charity was framed in paternal tones, an attitude that emerged later in post-Dissolution England towards the residents of almshouses.<sup>91</sup> The lack of provision for the old and impotent in Florence may be the result of different familial and cultural structures. Tight extended families may have ensured that most old and impotent people had some form of care and a roof over their heads, whereas the population of London was largely made up of people who had travelled to the city to find work and were therefore often far from the support of family.<sup>92</sup> Vanessa Harding wrote that family life was fragile in fifteenth-century London. Immigration combined with a high urban mortality rate and the harsh realities of disease and death were constantly reshaping the metropolitan population:

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<sup>89</sup> Rijpma, 'Funding Public Services Through Religious and Charitable Foundations in the Late Medieval Low Countries', p. 42.

<sup>90</sup> See Chapter Five, pp. 169-170.

<sup>91</sup> Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, p. 273; for an examination of the agency of almspeople within the almshouse see Chapters Five and Six.

<sup>92</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 43.

Even when marriages were comparatively happy and settled they were still fragile and often short-lived and the likelihood of bringing a whole family of offspring to adulthood – or living to see that – was limited.<sup>93</sup>

The apparent lack of provision for the impotent and elderly in Florence, may also be a factor of the surviving archive. Artisan and guilds were regarded with suspicion in Florence, as in the Netherlands and Bruges, and so the hospitals founded by them only survived in their original form for a short time and the records have been lost, whereas City companies in London were embedded in the government of the city and, although many early records have been lost, the institutions themselves survive to the present day along with many of their almshouse foundations.<sup>94</sup>

The populations served by the almshouses in these cities were different. Only three almshouse foundations in London were exclusively for women, between 1330 and 1600. The other forty-nine were either for men (but usually couples in practice), or mixed sex. Widows were much preferred as the recipients of charity in both Florence and Bruges. In Florence women seem to have been particularly vulnerable because of the tendency of men to marry much younger women. In London, the inheritance laws, and the ability of a widow to take on the trade of her husband and membership of a City company meant that widows could be highly valued as wives. The almshouses of London were also aimed at individual communities, members of a craft or members of a parish, for example.

In summary, like London, Norwich, and Bruges, the specialisation of hospitals was occurring in Florence from the thirteenth century. Institutions for the aged and impotent developed, but these were mediated by the prevailing paternal attitude in Florence to the poor receiving charity and the preferred charitable activities of providing care for the young and acutely sick. This combined with a greater awareness, in Florence, of the needs and wellbeing of the city as a whole, especially in terms of the need for a healthy workforce and resulted in both effort and finance pouring into sophisticated hospitals aimed at providing effective medical treatment. In London, Norwich and Bruges, however, the focus of donors was on smaller communities of

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<sup>93</sup> Harding, 'Families in later medieval London: sex, marriage and mortality', pp. 17, 26.

<sup>94</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 43.

personal relevance, such as company or parish. This led to the development of small almshouses, which were more sophisticated than the smaller artisan and widows hospitals of Florence in terms of their architecture, structure and benefits provision. In London, almshouse foundations demonstrated an understanding that the residents were independent agents who needed to exercise charity themselves to serve God and their fellow man in order to save their own souls and the souls of the founder and the members of the organisation which administered the almshouse.

In all the cities studied here, acts of mercy or charity and mediation between the living and the dead were the province of the Church. The older medieval hospitals of London were run by religious orders with support and finance from lay people, who wanted to be remembered in prayers and associated with their activities. However, by the late-medieval period, the fraternities, guilds, confraternities and City companies were providing a mechanism for lay people to take control of their own relationship with God, particularly in terms of their ability to perform acts of charity, and to alleviate the sufferings of souls in purgatory.<sup>95</sup>

Nonetheless there were significant differences in the way fraternities, confraternities and guilds decided to direct their charitable activities based on local habits and practice. Charitable responses in London and Westminster remained localised to individual craft or fraternal communities or within one of the 110 parishes in the City, well into the early-modern period. However, some of the larger Florentine confraternities, and the magistracy of the city of Bruges, were less confined by the spatial boundaries of parish and looked at the city as a whole unit: they analysed the issues and established city-wide priorities for charitable intervention. Interestingly, however, Carole Rawcliffe found yet another pattern of almshouse foundation in Norwich. All the aldermen of Norwich belonged to the guild of St George, but they saw no need to establish an almshouse. Neither did the trade and craft guilds of Norwich feel the need to found almshouses. Rawcliffe suggested that this lack of enthusiasm was due to the success of other institutions which already fulfilled this need in the city. The monastic hospital of St Paul had been largely converted into an almshouse by this

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<sup>95</sup> Thomas Frank, 'Confraternities, Memoria, and Law in Late Medieval Italy', *Confraternitas*, 17, 1 (2006), p. 3.

period and the popular hospital of St Giles had also established an almshouse.<sup>96</sup> It would appear that the cities where guilds and companies had more power, wealth and prestige were more likely to have small, specialised hospital institutions administered by guilds, but guilds and companies were also pragmatic and declined to found almshouses if they felt the need was already adequately met.

### 4.3 Conclusion

In conclusion, therefore, companies were particularly successful administrators of almshouses in the City of London. They used their financial, legal, and administrative skills to establish almshouses that were resilient and more likely to survive the turbulent times around them. The almshouses administered by religious organisations were at risk from the ineptitude of individual masters or wardens, but not all these almshouses were poorly managed. Some, particularly those administered by fraternities with a similar collective accountability as the companies, were well organised and successful. Parish almshouses were varied, practical and adaptable in their administration of almshouses. The early parish almshouses were closed by the Dissolution, but the foundation of parish almshouses re-started almost immediately. Almshouses administered by independent lay trusts took longer to emerge in the City of London, probably due to the dominant success of the City companies.

Successful almshouses, as measured by their longevity, had several factors in common. These included reliable, competent and accountable administration, perceived value to the community, accounting and reporting procedures and oversight, legal protection, and adequate financial provision, though the latter was not as important as the perceived value of the almshouse to the community administering it.

Almshouses seem to have been a popular institution in London and Bruges from the thirteenth century. Purpose-built almshouses founded by lay people and run by lay organisations such as the City companies, rather than religious organisations, appear to have developed in London at the beginning of the fifteenth century, a little earlier than Bruges.

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<sup>96</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', pp. 7-8.

Looking across Europe at Bruges and Florence the specialisation of hospital institutions seems to have occurred within a comparable time-frame. However, different countries, and towns or cities within nation states appear to have developed individual specialised institutions. Institutions for the poor, aged and impotent appear in all the areas studied, but attitudes to who deserved help and how that help should be given vary from place to place. It seems to be impossible to say that the almshouse institution started in one place and was copied by other countries, as in the case of S. Maria Nuova in Florence and the Savoy hospital in London. Rather, it appears that the same concept of charity and the same desire to serve God and fellow man, the same desire of lay people to have agency over their relationship with God, all mediated by the Catholic Church, was the primary motivation for the development of these specialised institutions. They developed in forms appropriate to local needs, understanding and traditions, in ways that were affected by local political issues, such as the development or suppression of craft guilds and the size of parish boundaries. However, of all these issues, the fact remains that the companies of London were the most successful at maintaining the almshouse institutions given into their care for the long-term.

We have seen that the almshouses developed as a form of specialised hospital in London and across Europe. In Chapter Five we will examine how the almshouses of London and Westminster provided for the health and wellbeing of their residents.

## Chapter Five: The Healing Environment of the Almshouse

When Phylick needs, let theſe thy Doctours be,  
Good dyet, quiet thoughts, heart mirthful free.<sup>1</sup>

While there has been a large amount of work analysing the impact of medieval hospitals on both physical and spiritual health, very few studies have examined almshouses in this context.<sup>2</sup> This chapter begins to address that gap by examining the medieval almshouses of London and their capacity to support spiritual and bodily health as it was understood by contemporaries.

The use of the framework of the non-naturals to analyse the provision of care for spiritual and bodily health in medieval hospitals and almshouses is important. Initial writing on such institutions, by scholars like Rotha Mary Clay (1909) and W.H Godfrey (1935) often avoided the question of health care, preferring to focus on form and structure.<sup>3</sup> Where discussion of medical care was inevitable, they tended to compare the care in medieval institutions with the contemporary western biomedical paradigm of the author. Orme and Webster's work on the English Hospital (1995), asserted that the worship of God was more important than physical care but again used a western biomedical paradigm to analyse the physical care offered in the early hospitals, in terms of the numbers of professional physicians, surgeons or apothecaries that were employed.<sup>4</sup> Around the same time, the historiographical emphasis began to change. Roy Porter's landmark paper 'The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from below' (1985), argued that studies had previously concentrated on the relationship between doctor and patient and that this erroneously moved the focus from the patient to the doctor.<sup>5</sup> The problem with trying to write a history of medicine from the point of view

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<sup>1</sup> Philomen Holland, *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni Or, the Schoole of Salernes Regiment of Health: Containing, Most Learned and Judicious Directions and Instructions, for the Preservation, Guide, and Government of Man's Life*. ... (London, 1617), p. 3.

<sup>2</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*; Rawcliffe, 'Medicine for the Soul'; Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul. The Life, Death and Resurrection of an English Medieval Hospital*; P. Horden, 'Religion as Medicine: Music in Medieval Hospitals'.

<sup>3</sup> Clay, *The Medieval Hospitals of England*; Godfrey, *The English Almshouse*.

<sup>4</sup> Orme and Webster, *The English Hospital*.

<sup>5</sup> Roy Porter, 'The Patient's View: Doing Medical History from below', *Theory and Society*, 14. 2 (1985), pp. 175-198.

of the 'sufferer' is that very few people from the late-medieval and Tudor periods left accounts of their illnesses or treatments. Porter suggested we should therefore try to reconstruct history by inference, from the arts, ballads, plays and visual arts, and from documents that refer to health or illness incidentally. Porter calls this type of historical construction 'back projecting' and rightly suggested that it should be undertaken with caution.<sup>6</sup> Porter recommended that this approach should proceed through mapping experience, belief systems, images and symbols and a textual analysis of explanations for behaviours or medical directions. Remedies should also be investigated, along with the conventions and channels leading from sickness to response and what governs therapeutic intervention. It is also important when attempting to reconstruct contemporary ideas about medicine to establish what people did when they felt ill and what they thought was important for them to stay healthy.

In 1991 David Gentilcore proposed that medieval hospitals existed within the overlap between the medical and the ecclesiastical worlds. Carole Rawcliffe's book *Medicine for the Soul* about the Great Hospital in Norwich (1999) also supported this theme; she suggested that late-medieval hospitals demonstrated a symbiotic relationship between medicine and religion, and argued that they provided 'intensive spiritual care'.<sup>7</sup> This was followed by Peregrine Horden's (2001) discussion of music as a specific therapy in hospitals: he analysed the therapy in terms of a contemporary humoral approach to health. John Henderson's work on *The Renaissance Hospital in Italy* (2006) emphasised the role of Christ the Physician in healing both body and soul.<sup>8</sup> In 2007 Horden argued that in order to understand the healing environment of institutions like medieval hospitals and almshouses we need to think about health and healing in terms contemporary with the operation of the institution, and that if we do this we will begin to understand that religious medicine is not only for the soul, but the body too and that: 'The hospital as a non-natural environment is the extreme instance of medicine without doctors'.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Porter, 'The Patient's View', p. 185.

<sup>7</sup> D. Gentilcore, 'The Priest: ecclesiastical remedies and their variants' in *From Bishop to Witch: The System of the Sacred in Early Modern Terra d'Otranto* (Manchester, 1991), ch. 4, p. 3; Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, p. 320.

<sup>8</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*; Horden, 'Religion as Medicine: Music in Medieval Hospitals'.

<sup>9</sup> Horden, 'A non-natural environment', p. 134.



There are very few sources relating to almshouses that discuss these issues explicitly. Therefore, I will need to build (back-project as Porter called it) evidence from incidental sources. This needs to be done carefully, interpreting the incidental evidence; architecture, rules, indentures, textual, and comparative evidence in the context of contemporary understandings of health, wellbeing, and spirituality. Sources such as indentures (legal agreements) and rules are problematic in that they set out an ideal for an institution and do not necessarily reflect the actual lived experience. However, they are also useful for exactly the same reason. The implicit values and assumptions written into such documents can tell us much about fundamental attitudes and expectations relating to health and wellbeing that were inherent in the social and cultural ethos of the institution from its foundation.

To facilitate the comparison between medieval hospitals and almshouses I will be using evidence from St Bartholomew's Hospital London, a hospital that would have been familiar to almshouse founders in London, some of whom, such as Richard Whittington and Martin Bowes, were directly involved in its management over a century apart.<sup>10</sup> The almshouses examined here are mainly those that have preserved ordinances or wills that give an insight into the healing environment of the almshouse. These span the breadth of the time-frame of this study. Most, such as Elsyngspital (1330), St Katharine's Hospital (1354), Richard Whittington's Almshouse (1424), St Augustine Papey (1442), Henry VII's Almshouse (1502), Milbourne's Almshouse (1534), The Countess of Kent's Almshouse (1537) and Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse (1595), are at the wealthier end of the almshouse foundation spectrum. However, evidence relating to health and wellbeing has also been found from some less wealthy and more informal almshouses, including: the Brewers' Almshouse (1422), Haberdashers' Almshouse (1543) and Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouse (1577).

Therefore, this chapter will analyse the provision of spiritual and bodily care, and the promotion of health in terms of the maintenance of the balance of the non-naturals, in late-medieval and Tudor almshouses. To do this I will first examine contemporary

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<sup>10</sup> Kerling, *Cartulary of St Bartholomew's Hospital*, no. 849. In 1547 Martin Bowes as Mayor of London negotiated with Henry VIII to purchase St Bartholomew's Hospital for the City of London. Norman Moore, *The History of St. Bartholomew's Hospital*, 2 vols (London, 1923), 2, pp. 194-6.

understandings of bodily (humoral theory) and spiritual health and sickness, then analyse the environment of almshouses as compared to hospitals in the way they sought to manage the non-naturals and provision of medical practitioners within the almshouse to care for the sick and feeble.

## 5.1 Understanding Health and Sickness

The medieval understanding of health and sickness was influenced by Christian theology and humoral theory. Humoral theory was widely known and accepted throughout late-medieval society. Even lower levels of society were familiar with the theory, facilitated by the memorisation of rhyming works such as the *Regimen Sanitatis*.<sup>11</sup> Humoral theory, predominantly laid out by Hippocrates and developed by Galen, embodied a holistic approach to human health.<sup>12</sup> Galen wrote that man consists of body and soul, nature and essence; he saw no division between the health of the body, the mind or the soul.<sup>13</sup> Humoral theory was based on the idea that a deficit or excess of one of four bodily humours, blood, phlegm, yellow bile or black bile, dictated temperament and affected health.<sup>14</sup> Each humour was related to one of four temperaments (sanguine, choleric, phlegmatic and melancholic), seasons, elements or qualities (hot or cold, moist or dry) (see figure 14 below); and all humours were understood to be present in the body in varying quantities. The body was described as existing in one of three states, healthy, neutral or sick. Sickness was thought to result from an imbalance of the humours, trauma or congenital malformation.<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> Horden, 'A non-natural environment', p. 134.

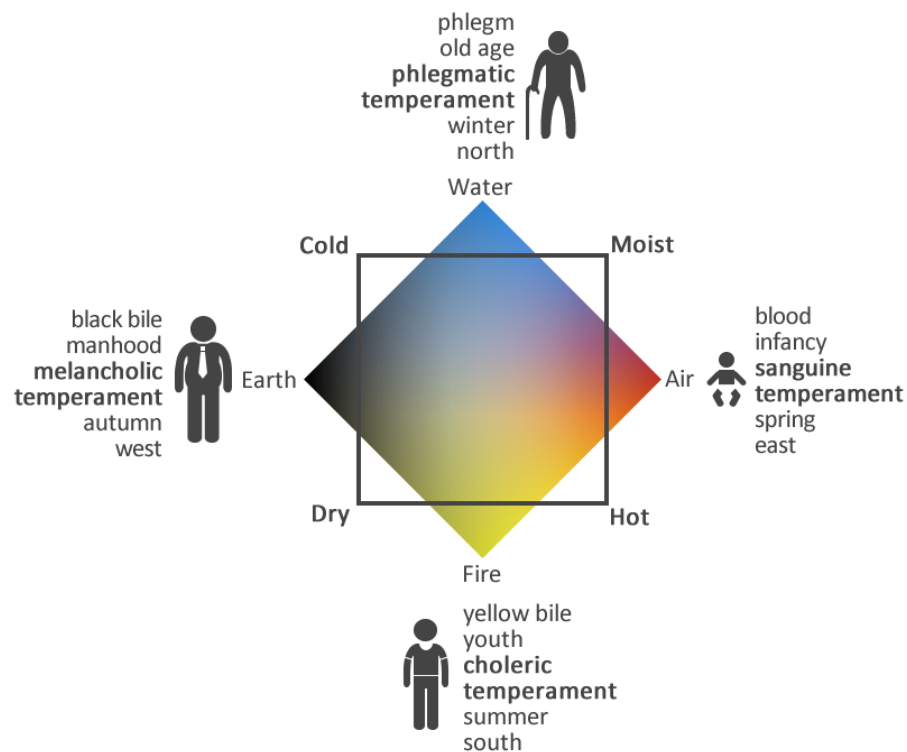
<sup>12</sup> D. Gentilcore, 'Medical Pluralism in the Kingdom of Naples', *Healers and Healing in Early Modern Italy* (Manchester, 1998), p. 4.

<sup>13</sup> P. Donini, 'Psychology', in R. J. Hankinson ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Galen* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 184.

<sup>14</sup> Pedro Gil-Sotres, 'The Regimens of Health', in Mirko D. Grmek ed. and Anthony Shugaar trans., *Western Medical Thought from Antiquity to the Middle Ages* (London, 1998), pp. 291-318, 302-314.

<sup>15</sup> Siraisi, *Medieval and Early Renaissance Medicine*, p. 120.

Figure 5.1: The Four Humours



The balance of humours could be affected, positively or negatively, by outside factors which were termed non-naturals. A healthy person was seen as a delicate system with the humours in balance, and the aim of medical intervention was to maintain that state of health or to restore the sick body to a healthy equilibrium. ‘Contra-naturals’ - disease, the causes of disease and the sequels of disease - were thought to be caused by an imbalance in the humours, which were disrupted by a problem with the non-naturals. The *Isagoge of Joannitius* stated:

There are six types of causes [non-naturals] that are associated with health and sickness. The first is the air which surrounds the human body, [then] food and drink, exercise and rest, sleep and waking, fasting and fullness, and incidental conditions of the mind. All these preserve health from accidents, if used with appropriate moderation as to quantity, quality, time, function and order. But if anything is done contrary to this, diseases occur and persist.<sup>16</sup>

The effective management of the six non-naturals lay at the heart of medieval understanding of medicine. Johannes de Mirfield, a cleric who lived as a pensioner at St Bartholomew’s Hospital in the late fourteenth century, included a discussion of the

<sup>16</sup> ‘The Isagoge of Joannitius’, in Faith Wallis ed., *Medieval Medicine: A Reader* (Toronto, 2010), p. 150.

non-naturals in both his books, *Breviarium Bartholomei* and *Florarium Bartholomei*, and described them as essential basic knowledge both for the cure of the sick and the maintenance of good health.<sup>17</sup> The Greek word *Therapeia*, used by both Hippocrates and Galen, meant both care and cure, and was taken to refer to the sick body, the healthy body and, importantly, the soul. The popular medieval treatise the *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* detailed the action that should be taken by individuals to preserve or restore health:

When Phylick needs, let theſe thy Doctours be,  
Good dyet, quiet thoughts, heart mirthful free.<sup>18</sup>

The most effective forms of therapy, therefore, both care and cure, were thought to be the management of the non-naturals, in this case primarily diet and accidents of the soul.

There was an intrinsic connection between health of the soul and health of the body in the minds of medieval people. An example of this is found in Canon 22 of the Fourth Lateran Council (1215), which used medical metaphors to talk about matters of the spirit in relation to the treatment of sickness.

Since bodily infirmity is sometimes caused by sin, ...we declare in the present decree and strictly command that when physicians of the body are called to the bedside of the sick, before all else they admonish them to call for the physician of souls, so that after spiritual health has been restored to them, the application of bodily medicine may be of greater benefit, for the cause being removed the effect will pass away.<sup>19</sup>

Sin is described here as a direct cause of ill health based on biblical teaching that Jesus healed bodily infirmities by divinely forgiving sin.<sup>20</sup> However, there follows a fascinating passage where the healing of souls was implicitly linked with Galenic

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<sup>17</sup> *Johannes De Mirfeld of St Bartholomew's, Smithfield: His life and works*, Percival Horton-Smith Hartley and Harold Aldridge eds. (Cambridge, 1936). Information on the non-naturals is contained in part 15 of the *Breviarium* and in the chapter 'De Medicus' in the *Florarium*.

<sup>18</sup> Holland, *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni*, p. 3.

<sup>19</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, I pp. 245-246.

<sup>20</sup> There are approximately sixty-six references to healing in the New Testament, but only a small selection of these (9) refer to the forgiveness of sins or cleansing from sin: Matthew 4. 23-24; Matthew 8. 5 – 17; Matthew 9.2-8; Mark 1. 40-42 Mark 2.3-12; Luke 5.12-15; Luke 5. 17-25; Luke 17. 12-19; John 9. 1 -7.

humoral theory: priests were referred to as 'physicians of the soul' and the concept of humoral theory, which emphasised the importance of identifying and removing the cause of sickness before progressing to treatment, was equated with the spiritual forgiveness of sins as an explanation of the efficiency of both ecclesiastical and medical intervention in the healing of the sick.

Supernatural or spiritual causes of disease were perceived to be an imminent hazard in the medieval period and sickness could result from demonic possession, sorcery, or as divine punishment for sin.<sup>21</sup> The wellbeing of the soul was of critical importance, not only because of the risk of hell, purgatory and suffering after death, but also because sin caused suffering in the here and now.<sup>22</sup> As we have seen, Galenic humoral theory saw no boundary between body, mind or soul, so damage to the soul could cause sickness or infirmity in the body and vice-versa.

The ideal of Christ the Physician, acting with charity, healing the sick, feeding and clothing the poor, was an inspiration for the foundation of both medieval hospitals and almshouses.<sup>23</sup> The image of Christ the Physician was central to the foundation of St Bartholomew's Hospital in 1123. Rahere, the founder, was suffering from an illness while on pilgrimage to Rome and had a vision of St Bartholomew, who instructed him to build a church and promised that:

For everyone who being converted and penitent shall pray in this place shall be heard in heaven, or, seeking with a perfect heart help from any tribulation, without doubt shall obtain it...<sup>24</sup>

Christ the Physician in heaven was depicted as the greatest healer; for him nothing was impossible, there could be no better or more important medicine than to immerse your body, mind and soul in faith and the worship of Christ and the saints.

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<sup>21</sup> Gentilcore, 'Medical Pluralism in the Kingdom of Naples', p. 12.

<sup>22</sup> Chapter Two, p. 52.

<sup>23</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Christ the Physician Walks the Wards', pp. 78-97. John Henderson, 'Healing the Body and Saving the Soul: Hospitals in Renaissance Florence', *Renaissance Studies*, 15 (2001), p. 189; Sirasi, *Renaissance Medicine*, p. 9.

<sup>24</sup> E. A. Webb, ed., *The Book of the Foundation of the Priory Church of St Bartholomew's Hospital, West Smithfield*, translated Humphrey H. King and William Barnard (Oxford 1923) p.5.; BL Cottonian MS Vespasian B. IX, fols 113-123. See later in this chapter and Chapter Seven, pp. 257-8, for further discussion of the place of the almshouse in the relationship between the living and the dead.

Medieval people were not only concerned with the health of the living; they also worried about the well-being of the dead in purgatory. As we have seen in Chapter Two, by the mid-fourteenth century purgatory had developed into a 'transactional' concept where the living could continue to communicate with the dead and ease their suffering in a variety of practical ways, by saying prayers, singing psalms, lighting candles and performing acts of charity. The charitable reduction of the suffering of the living played a practical role in the reduction of suffering of the dead. Medieval hospitals and almshouses played a major role in this transaction, operating in a liminal space between the living and the dead and enabling works of charity along with spiritual and bodily healing to flow between the earthly world and the world of the dead.<sup>25</sup>

## 5.2 Non-Natural Therapy in the Almshouse

In order to analyse the health provision of almshouses in terms of a contemporary medieval understanding of health and sickness we need to think about how the institutions manipulated or managed the balance of the non-naturals, both physically and spiritually in order to promote or restore health.<sup>26</sup> To do this we need to concentrate on the physical and spiritual environment and the patterns of everyday living. Evidence for this can be found in the architecture of the institutions along with the surviving regulations and ordinances. I shall therefore take each non-natural in turn (air, food and drink, fasting and fullness, sleeping and waking, exercise and rest and the accidents of the soul), and compare the provision for management of each non-natural in the environment of the almshouse with that of a medieval hospital in relation to the maintenance or restoration of bodily and spiritual health.

### 5.2.1 Air

According to the doctrine of the non-naturals, disease was thought to spread through miasma, which, with bad smells, was considered potentially infectious. Therefore, good ventilation was vital for the maintenance of health. Whittington's almshouse was

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<sup>25</sup> For more on the charitable role of almshouses see Chapter Three, pp. 87-93.

<sup>26</sup> Christopher Bonfield, 'Therapeutic Regime for Bodily Health in Medieval English Hospitals', in L. Abreau and S. Sheard, eds., *Hospital Life Theory and Practice from the Medieval to the Modern* (Oxford, 2013), p. 27.

built with good ventilation in mind. Each person in the almshouse had their own building, described as a 'cell or little house' in the ordinances.<sup>27</sup> These individual buildings had both windows (with glass) and hearths with chimneys to allow proper ventilation and the maintenance of an adequate temperature. The residents were also supplied with coal to burn for warmth.<sup>28</sup> Smoke from burning coal, particularly the sea coal supplied to London, was understood to be detrimental to health, so the provision of good hearths and chimneys was particularly important.<sup>29</sup> Seven almshouses in this study provided coal for residents, charcoal was provided by four almshouses and one almshouse, Sir Ambrose Nicholas (Salters), provided coal, charcoal and faggots.<sup>30</sup> These facilities were also available at Henry VII's Almshouse at Westminster and at both the Countess of Kent's Almshouse and Milbourne's Almshouse. Other almshouses had a different structure. The almshouse at St Katharine's Hospital, Elsyngspital, Andrew Judd's Almshouse and the Brewers' Almshouse consisted of individual rooms within a larger building, but even the poorest of these, the Brewers' Almshouse, made sure the rooms had windows for good ventilation and fuel to keep the almsfolk warm.<sup>31</sup> According to humoral theory, as people aged, they required warm and moist air, free from draughts and noxious fumes to maintain health.<sup>32</sup>

People treated at St Bartholomew's Hospital did not have access to such luxuries as individual rooms and chimneys, but their environment still took account of the need to manage air. The exact floorplan of St Bartholomew's Hospital is unclear, but there is evidence that initially the sick, poor, pilgrims and orphans were housed in the nave of the hospital Church. Moore records the removal of an internal chapel to make more

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<sup>27</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 112.

<sup>28</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, pp. 111, 112.

<sup>29</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 165-166.

<sup>30</sup> Coal was supplied by Merchant Taylors', Thomas Beaumont's, Henry VII's, Whittington's, St Stephen's Westminster, and Andrew Judd's almshouses. Charcoal was supplied by Milbourne's, Robert Tyrwhitt's, Henry West's and Galliard's almshouses.

<sup>31</sup> Caroline Metcalf, 'William Porlond, clerk (d. 1440) and the Brewers' Company of London: A Study of Guildhall Library Manuscript 5440' (unpublished master's thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2012), Appendix 7: pp. 77-85.

<sup>32</sup> Luke Demaitre, 'The Care and Extension of Old Age in Medieval Medicine', in M. M Sheehan ed., *Aging and the Aged in Medieval Europe* (Toronto, 1983) p 14. Laleh Bakhtiar ed., *Avicenna On Healthy Living* trans. O. Cameron Gruner and Mazar H. Shah (Chicago, 1999), p. 73, demonstrates this in his tract on managing the elderly. This Islamic text was published in England in 1593, but the principles are based on classic humoral theory.

room for them. A later note referred to an infirmary and a hall and chapel.<sup>33</sup> Both these buildings would have had a high roof with Gothic windows, which support good ventilation, but we do not know if the windows could be opened. In the directions for the New Order of the Hospital, published in 1552, the almoners were given responsibility for providing wood and coal, so it would seem that the intention was the hospital should be heated.<sup>34</sup>

Incense was used in religious ceremonies as a symbol of prayer rising to heaven, and the 'pleasing aroma of Christ', and it was also used as a method of purifying the air both physically and spiritually.<sup>35</sup> There is evidence that the residents of Whittington's, Henry VII's, St Katharine's, Countess of Kent's, Milbourne's and Elsyngspital almshouses attended Mass every day. Some almshouses had a heavier requirement of Church attendance than others, but there seems to have been a general expectation of regular, daily attendance at Mass. The sick poor at St Bartholomew's would also have experienced incense daily, particularly if they were lodged in the nave of the Church. For the sick at St Bartholomew's, the incense had the bonus of covering the smell of suppurating wounds, sickness and disease.

### 5.2.2 Food and drink

As we have seen, food was frequently regarded as a medicine in the late-Middle Ages. Galen referred to the medical use of food as 'dietetics'.<sup>36</sup> Dietetic therapy included many substances. Galen talks of these as *prospheromena*, substances taken in by the body, which could include food, drink, medicine and air or vapours.<sup>37</sup> These substances were thought to act upon the body and affect the balance of the humours, so food had a central role both in the maintenance of health and as a therapy during sickness.

The use of food as medicine was referred to in both the Rule of Augustine, the monastic rule which served as a model for daily life at many hospitals and almshouses

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<sup>33</sup> Moore, *History of St Bartholomew's*, 1. p. 56; 2. p. 26.

<sup>34</sup> Moore, *History of St Bartholomew's*, 2. p. 169.

<sup>35</sup> 'For we are to God the pleasing aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing' 2 Corinthians 2.15.

<sup>36</sup> P. J. van der Eijk, 'Therapeutics' in R. J. Hankinson ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Galen* (Cambridge, 2008), p. 288.

<sup>37</sup> van der Eijk, 'Therapeutics', p. 299.



(such as Elsyngspital and Whittington's), and several of the surviving almshouse ordinances. The Rule of Augustine states:

The care of the sick, whether those in convalescence or others suffering from some indisposition, even though free of fever, shall be assigned to a brother who can personally obtain from the pantry whatever he sees is necessary for each one.<sup>38</sup>

And:

And just as the sick must take less food to avoid discomfort, so too, after their illness, they are to receive the kind of treatment that will quickly restore their strength, even though they come from a life of extreme poverty. Their more recent illness has, as it were, afforded them what accrued to the rich as part of their former way of life. But when they have recovered their former strength, they should go back to their happier way of life which, because their needs are fewer, is all the more in keeping with God's servants. Once in good health, they must not become slaves to the enjoyment of food, which was necessary to sustain them in their illness. For it is better to suffer a little want than to have too much.<sup>39</sup>

The first of these passages demonstrates that treatment of the sick involved using ingredients from the pantry or kitchen store-cupboard. The link between food and medicine is central and implicit. The reader was expected to understand that when you were sick, food was a primary form of medicine. The second passage demonstrates that different stages of illness required a different approach to food. The sick need less food, but it needed to be enjoyable to 'sustain them in their illness'; the convalescent needed more food to restore their strength, but once recovered the patient was to return to a normal healthy but frugal diet.

Several almshouse ordinances also reflect these concerns. Queen Philippa's ordinances for St Katharine's Hospital (1354) state that the sisters and Poor Bedes women were to:

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<sup>38</sup> *The Rule of St Augustine*, c.400 AD, trans. Robert Russell, O.S.A., based on the critical text of Luc Verheijen, O.S.A. 'La règle de saint Augustin', *Études Augustiniennes*, (Paris, 1967) Ch. V 8.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*

...be provided with victuals and medicines suitable to their disorder or infirmity, in like manner to the brethren of the hospital.<sup>40</sup>

The brethren of the hospital were directed:

...if it shall fortune that any of the brethren shall be confined by bad state of health, or in taking medicines for the preservation of the health of their bodies, then such as shall be so confined shall have their whole allowance in their chambers without diminution, and if what shall be provided for them shall not be thought proper for the nature of their disorder, they shall have a competent share of any other kind of food suitable to their infirmities as shall be agreeable to reason and the rules of the said house.<sup>41</sup>

This passage again shows that the food given to people during sickness could be different from that provided when they were well; food was considered part of the treatment for disease and as a specific medicine for both the individual and the malady.

The type of food eaten by almspeople is very elusive in the documentation. The Minute Book of William Porlond referred to Edward Bryton, who was described as the almshouse cook, so it was possible that even poorer almshouses like the Brewers' could employ someone to cook for the residents.<sup>42</sup> There are also entries in William Porlond's book of the Brewers' Company that suggest the almshouse had a garden with raised beds in which to grow herbs.<sup>43</sup>

Three almshouses (Henry VII's, St Katharine's and the Haberdashers') provide illuminating insights into the diet of the residents. The sisters and poor Bedes women at St Katharine's were given a diet, which comprised two loaves, one white the other brown, a flagon of ale or a penny in lieu of the ale, and two pieces of different sorts of meat to the value of one and a half pennies, with a double portion being given fifteen times a year on feast-days.<sup>44</sup> The ordinances of Henry VII's Almshouse (1502) are even more prescriptive about the type of food the almsmen were to eat: 'good and holsome

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<sup>40</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 71.

<sup>42</sup> Metcalf, 'William Porlond', p. 79.

<sup>43</sup> Metcalf, 'William Porlond', p. 21.

<sup>44</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 72.

potagies', with a 'ferthyng lofe' and a 'quarte of ale' at each dinner, together with 'cates, flesshe or fisshe as the season shall require'.<sup>45</sup> They were also to be given mustard when they were served with 'salt fisshe' or 'heryng'.<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, the kitchen accounts from Elsyngspital also specify the provision of peas for potage, stockfish and herring along with ale and wheat for bread.<sup>47</sup> Thomas Huntlow's endowment to the Haberdashers' Almshouse in 1543 provided 1d worth of bread, 1d ale and 2d 'flesh sodden in porrage', which was to be provided to each of the almsfolk quarterly.<sup>48</sup> This was clearly not enough food to sustain one person for three months, and was supplemented by other pension endowments, but it does demonstrate the type of food that was considered appropriate for the residents of almshouses.

Food was thought to affect the body by promoting the production of different humours. Each food had a specific humoral nature and could be placed on a continuum from dry to moist or hot to cold, and their medical value was based on where they were positioned on that continuum. Old people were conceptualised as having cold and dry humours, of phlegmatic temperament so health in the elderly was promoted by providing foods that restored balance by being moistening and warming.<sup>49</sup> The most warming and moistening foods include onions and broth (a staple of potage), walnuts, chickpeas, mulberries, mutton and tripe, which could be added to other dishes to maintain a correct humoral balance.<sup>50</sup> Terence Scully described the way cooks could adjust the humoral temperament of a meal using sauces and garden herbs or expensive spices, to make sure the food was temperamentally neutral and unlikely to cause eaters a health problem. Likewise, when someone was ill, sauces and dishes could be modified to promote humoral balance.<sup>51</sup> The use of the adjective 'holsome' (wholesome) with regards to the potage in Henry VII's Almshouse ordinances underlines the intention that the potages should not be contaminated or of lower quality, that they should do good and be beneficial to the almsmen. The *Oxford*

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<sup>45</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498 73v.

<sup>46</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498 73v.

<sup>47</sup> TNA SC6/1257/3 – Elsyngspital Kitchen Accounts.

<sup>48</sup> *Endowed Charities*, pp. 475-476.

<sup>49</sup> Terence Scully, 'A Cook's Therapeutic Use of Garden Herbs', *Health and Healing from the Medieval Garden*, Peter Dendle and Alain Touwaide eds. (Woodbridge, 2008), p. 61.

<sup>50</sup> Chart 2, Scully, 'A Cook's Therapeutic Use of Garden Herbs', p. 62.

<sup>51</sup> Scully, 'A Cook's Therapeutic Use of Garden Herbs', p. 63.

*English Dictionary* gives a secondary meaning to 'holsome' more commonly used in the late-Middle Ages, which is that of restoring physical health: remedial, curative or medicinal.<sup>52</sup>

The 'cates', or 'achates', provided at Henry VII's Almshouse, was a middle English word for food purchased and brought in rather than grown or produced at home from the garden.<sup>53</sup> The specification of 'achates' within the ordinances indicates these foods were thought of as delicacies, separate, or different, from foods prepared within the almshouse. Achates could include delicacies prepared outside the almshouse, as well as herbs and spices, pepper, ginger, cumin, that added flavour and savour to the food, but also had medicinal value. The estimate of yearly charges included in the New Order for St Bartholomew's also included payments for foodstuffs not grown by the hospital; sugar, and spices for 'cawdelles for the sick'.<sup>54</sup>

Food and drink were of both spiritual and bodily significance within almshouses. Some almshouses followed the monastic and collegiate practice of eating communally. The residents at Whittington's Almshouse ate with the residents at the College of Priests and while they ate, they were to:

...absteyne thaime fro veyn and ydil words in asmoche as they may and if thei wille ony thing talke that hit be honest and profitable.<sup>55</sup>

They were also to listen to a passage of scripture, or the life of a saint. At Henry VII's Almshouse almsmen were to listen to grace before and after meals, along with the psalms *De Profundis* and *Placebo* and *Dirige*.<sup>56</sup> These rules mirror the rule of St Augustine:

When you come to table, listen until you leave to what is the custom to read, without disturbance or strife. Let not your mouths alone take nourishment but let your hearts too hunger for the word of God.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>52</sup> *OED*.

<sup>53</sup> The *OED* defines 'Cates' as – 'Provisions or victuals bought (as distinguished from, and usually more delicate or dainty than, those of home production); in later use, sometimes merely = victuals, food'. My thanks to Caroline Yeldham for assistance in uncovering the meaning of this term.

<sup>54</sup> Moore, *The History of St Bartholomew's Hospital*, 2 p. 178.

<sup>55</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 34.

<sup>56</sup> The Ordinances of Henry VII's Almshouse: Fox, 'The Royal Almshouse at Westminster', p. 272.

<sup>57</sup> *The Rule of St Augustine*, Ch.III 2.

At Whittington's Almshouse each almsman and college priest contributed to the cost of the food from their pensions.<sup>58</sup> Despite their relative poverty, the residents at the Brewers' Almshouse may also have eaten communally; William Porlond referred to an almshouse cook, an almshouse kitchen and a great chamber with a bowl for washing hands.<sup>59</sup> At Henry VII's Almshouse the almsmen also ate dinner communally, but in consideration of their old age they were to be given bread and ale, which was to be taken to their chambers to serve them for their suppers.<sup>60</sup> Special provision was made for those who were too sick to come to the refectory for meals.

Provided alwey that suche of the said pore men as for siknesse or oder impotenae may not come into the hall to dyner be serued by the said pore women in their chambers for their dyuer with like poznon of brede ale potagies and achates that other of the company be serued within the said commne hall.<sup>61</sup>

Conversely, the sisters and poor Bedes women at St Katharine's ate and lived separately from the brothers of the hospital in almshouse-type accommodation. They were to receive their whole food allowance in their chambers. This appears to be a practical rule to prevent informal contact between brothers, sisters and poor Bedes women.

Spiritual food was served up daily at both almshouse and hospital. This included preaching, liturgy, prayer, and praise for the divine and most importantly, the Eucharist. The sight of the Host was considered to be health-giving; consumption of it was the ultimate therapy for body and soul. The Host was seen as a powerful spiritual medicine that had concrete physical benefit to patients. Carole Rawcliffe wrote:

The mere sight of the Host at the moment of elevation was deemed to ease the torment endured by all sinners in purgatory, and also to relieve the more immediate symptoms of earthly disease.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 34, 119.

<sup>59</sup> Metcalf, 'William Porlond', p. 21.

<sup>60</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 74r.

<sup>61</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 74v.

<sup>62</sup> Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, p. 319.

The Host, through the process of transubstantiation, was seen as the physical presence of Christ the ultimate healer, and priests, as mediators between the people and the divine, were the natural facilitators of healing.<sup>63</sup>

There were clear differences between hospitals and almshouses in the way residents partook of spiritual food. Patients lying in St Bartholomew's Hospital and St Mary Bishopsgate Hospital could see an altar and participate passively in the daily round of services.<sup>64</sup> The healing power of the presence of Christ through the Host radiated around hospital patients at all times. The residents of Leper hospitals had a more dynamic relationship; sometimes they lived in sight of the Host and sometimes near a chapel, and they participated actively in the daily round of prayer and praise.<sup>65</sup> Residents at the almshouse also played an active role in divine service. Almspeople lived in houses or rooms removed from the parish Church, but still often within its precincts.<sup>66</sup> They had daily contact with the healing power of the Host through attendance at Mass and other services, and they were active participants in these services, chanting psalms and prayers. This relationship will be discussed further, later in this chapter.

### 5.2.3 Fasting and Fullness, Sleeping and Waking

The non-naturals of sleeping and waking, and fasting and fullness, were regulated in almshouses by the spiritual discipline of the yearly and daily round of prayer, praise, and contemplation. The therapeutic value of the regulation of sleeping and waking, fasting and fullness, lay in moderation and regularity. The *Regimen Sanitatis Salernitanum* which was one of the first published popular medical texts of the late-medieval period and was published in English in 1528, praised the value of routine and light eating:

Great suppers put the ftomacke to great paine  
Sup lightly, if good reft you meane to gain...<sup>67</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> H. Cook, *The decline of the old medical regime in Stuart London* (Ithaca, 1986), p. 32.

<sup>64</sup> Moore, *History of St Bartholomew's*, 1, p. 56; Christopher Thomas, Barney Sloane and Christopher Phillpotts, *Excavations at the Priory and Hospital of St Mary Spital London* (London, 1997), p. 103.

<sup>65</sup> Rawcliffe, "A mighty force in the ranks of Christ's army", p. 100.

<sup>66</sup> See Chapter 7 p. 239. For discussion about the geographical position of almshouses in relation to the parish Church.

<sup>67</sup> Holland, *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni*, p.13.

...Sleep not too long in mornings, early rife,  
And with coole water wafh both hands and eyes,<sup>68</sup>

The rhythms of fasting and fullness were managed by the religious calendar. As we have seen, the sisters at St Katharine's were given double rations on the fifteen religious feast days they celebrated throughout the year.<sup>69</sup> They would also have been expected to adhere to fast days unless they were sick. St Augustine's rule forbade fasting for those sick or weak:

Subdue the flesh, so far as your health permits, by fasting and abstinence from food and drink. However, when someone is unable to fast, he should still take no food outside mealtimes unless he is ill.<sup>70</sup>

The sick patients at both the hospital and almshouses would have been spared the full rigour of fasting, though the religious rules about fast and feast days would have been observed by the almsfolk who were well. Fasting officially took place on Wednesdays, Fridays and Saturdays during the week and involved abstinence from meat, eggs and dairy products.<sup>71</sup> But by the sixteenth century this had reduced to Wednesdays and Fridays. The main fasts during the year took place for forty days of Lent and during Advent (the four weeks before Christmas).<sup>72</sup> Lent was the most important and closely followed, when no meat or fat derived from meat could be eaten. Fish dishes were the order of the day, the quantity of food was supposed to be reduced and the number of daily meals was reduced from two to one.<sup>73</sup> The extent to which almspeople kept to the fast probably varied. As we have seen, St Augustine's rule allows for individual differences in people's ability to follow a fast and the aged and sick were expressly excused from fasting. Barbara Harvey reports that the monks at Westminster Abbey were very adept at getting around the more stringent restrictions of fast days, but there is nothing to suggest criticism of almsfolk in London for gluttony or avoiding their fasting duties.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>68</sup> Holland, *Regimen Sanitatis Salerni*, p. 4.

<sup>69</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 71.

<sup>70</sup> *The Rule of St Augustine* Ch. III 1.

<sup>71</sup> Brigit Henisch, *Fast and Feast: Food in Medieval Society* (Pennsylvania, 1976), p. 30.

<sup>72</sup> Henisch, *Fast and Feast*, p. 30.

<sup>73</sup> Henisch, *Fast and Feast*, p. 32.

<sup>74</sup> Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, p. 40.

The Reformation upset the traditional cycle of religious feast and fast days. Initially people carried on observing the saints' days which had been banned.<sup>75</sup> However, on 11 March 1538 Henry VIII issued a proclamation which dispensed with the Lenten fast, ostensibly because of a scarcity of fish.<sup>76</sup> This caused much division among the population, with traditionalists keeping the old ways despite the ban, and modernists eating meat during Lent. In 1541 the feast days of St Mary Magdalen, St Mark and St Luke were restored. At the same time the fast of the Eve of St Mark was abolished, along with the fast on St Lawrence's Day.<sup>77</sup> The mixed response to these changes continued until the restoration of Catholicism and hence feasting and fasting, during the reign of Mary in 1553. The accession of Elizabeth I in 1559 led to a reversion to Protestantism and the cult of the saints was banned again.<sup>78</sup> I have not found any records of the effect of this on fasting practice within the almshouses of London and Westminster. Subsequent foundations remained tactfully silent on the subject. The almspeople probably reacted like the general population, some quietly keeping the old ways, and some not.

Sleeping and waking were also regulated at the almshouses (and *leprosaria*) by the daily round of religious services and prayers.<sup>79</sup> The religious requirements specified by the almshouse ordinances varied between almshouses. The surviving evidence for religious observance by almsfolk is limited to a few almshouses - St Katharine's, Whittington's, Henry VII's, Milbourne's, the Countess of Kent's and Lady Anne Dacre's - but all of them specify attendance at daily Mass, and those that have a founder require some form of prayer around the founder's tomb. Three of the five, St Katharine's, Whittington's, and Henry VII's, specify what seems quite an onerous timetable of daily ritual (see figure 5.2 below). The Benedictine monastic day involved eight services, including two during the night.<sup>80</sup> The most rigorous almshouse regimen at Henry VII's Almshouse required attendance at five services a day, with one at night, albeit with

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<sup>75</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 404.

<sup>76</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 405.

<sup>77</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 430.

<sup>78</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 568.

<sup>79</sup> Rawcliffe, "A mighty force in the ranks of Christ's army", p. 100.

<sup>80</sup> Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, p. 154.



additional prayers, but allowances were made for those almspeople who were too old or incapacitated to attend.

The discipline of attendance at these services was reinforced in several almshouses by a range of means. At Henry VII's Almshouse a bell was rung throughout the day - between 6am and 7pm on the hour and at the quarter hour, to make sure the almsmen knew what the time was and were not late for services or prayer.<sup>81</sup> Other almshouses enforced a range of punishments for non-attendance: for example, at St Katharine's failure to keep to the rules was punished by withdrawal of food rations and later - at the Countess of Kent's almshouse - by fines and the ultimate sanction of removal from the almshouse.<sup>82</sup> However, as always, there was great diversity among the almshouses. Matthew Davies recorded that the Merchant Taylors' Almshouse required only weekly attendance at Church services, but as the ordinances for this almshouse do not survive it is hard to tell if this was the original intention or became the custom later. The spiritual requirements described in the almshouse ordinances may demonstrate an ideal other almshouses aspired to, although Milbourne's Almshouse and the Countess of Kent's Almshouse regulations demonstrate that this form of regimen was achievable at lower income level compared to Henry VII's or Richard Whittington's almshouses.<sup>83</sup>

Every one of the five pre- Dissolution almshouses compared in figure 5.2 required daily attendance at Mass. Three of the five also required attendance at midnight (Matins) and early morning services (Prime). Four of the pre- Dissolution almshouses required additional prayers around the tomb of the founder (the fifth, St Katharine's, did not have a founder's tomb in the Church). Attendance at Compline and Vespers was also required by the majority of the almshouses and two, Whittington's and Henry VII's also required private prayers before bed. For the most devout almshouses in this study, Whittington's and Henry VII's, almspeople could be expected to pray between nine and ten times a day and walk to Church for services between five and six times a day.

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<sup>81</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 63v.

<sup>82</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 71; CCA, CL/G/Mss/Angell/5/21/23.

<sup>83</sup> Davies, 'The Tailors of London and their Guild c 1300-1500', p. 54.

Figure 5.2: Religious observance requirements at almshouses in London and Westminster 1350 – 1600 <sup>84</sup>

Religious Observance	St Katharine's 1354	Whittington's 1422	Henry VII's 1502	Sir John Milbourne's 1534	Countess of Kent 1537	Lady Dacre's 1595
Matins	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Upon waking		Paternoster, Ave with special and hearty recommendation for soul of Richard and Alice Whittington on knees.	Before 7am - 5 Paternoster, 5 Ave Maria, 1 Creed			
Prime	Yes	Yes	Yes			
Mass	3 Masses daily plus weekly Mass for Virgin Mary and St Katharine	Attend High Mass daily	3 Chantry Masses at tomb. Almsmen to continue in prayer and to say the seven psalms, the litany for souls from the beginning of the first Mass to the end of the third.  Those too sick to attend chapel to pray in the almshouse.	Attend Mass daily 8am	Attend Mass daily	

<sup>84</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, Appendix 9; Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, pp. 115-6; BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 63v; Thomas Milbourn, 'The Milbourn Almshouses, and a brief account of the founder and his family', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 3. 2 (1867) pp. 146-8; CCA, CL/G/Mss/Angell/5/21/23; Charity Commission Report 31 May 1889, *Parochial Charities of Westminster* (London, 1890), p. 65.

Religious Observance	St Katharine's 1354	Whittington's 1422	Henry VII's 1502	Sir John Milbourne's 1534	Countess of Kent 1537	Lady Dacre's 1595
Prayers around tomb for founders		After High Mass <i>De profundis</i> <sup>85</sup> with the versicles and orisons that belong with it and those that cannot, should say 3 Paternosters 3 Aves and a Creed after this the tutor to say God have mercy upon the founder's souls and all Christian men and the almsmen say amen.	Prayers round tomb before evensong 5 Paternosters 5 Aves and a creed	Before Mass, <i>De profundis</i> , Paternoster, Ave and Creed plus Collect of day around tomb.	Priest to make holy bread and holy water every Sunday and give it to the Almswomen and then say <i>De profundis</i> at the tomb.	Almspeople to keep the tomb clean and dry.
Grace at Dinner		Spiritual reading	<i>De profundis</i> after dinner			
Evensong/ Vespers	Yes	Yes	Yes		Yes	
Compline	Yes	Yes	Yes (with vespers)		Yes	
Prayers before bed		Paternoster and Ave with special and hearty recommendation for soul of Richard and Alice Whittington on knees	7pm prayer in chapel before bed – Anthem Salve Regina			Evening prayer in the almshouse chapel
Special observance					Daily after Mass, evensong, and compline <i>De profundis</i> , Ave, Paternoster plus Collect or what prayers they can say.	Attendance at Sunday service

<sup>85</sup> Psalm 130.

St Bartholomew's hospital was ostensibly less demanding about religious observance, although those lying in the nave or infirmary were automatically present for the daily cycle of services held at the altar, and patients at hospitals were typically expected to spend their time in prayer and contemplation.<sup>86</sup> Later, in the Tudor period, the New Order regulations at St Bartholomew's Hospital required prayer from the sick. The Hospitaller was to visit the sick and:

...minister unto them the moste wholesome and necessary doctrine of God's comfortable words, aswel by readyng and preaching and also by ministering the sacrament of Holy Communion at tymes convenient.<sup>87</sup>

The Porter was also charged with patrolling the wards every evening to check that all was well and that prayers were being said, and he was empowered to punish patients who swore or were rude to the Matron or refused to go to bed at the lawful hours appointed.<sup>88</sup>

#### 5.2.4 Exercise and Rest

Exercise and rest were also catered for at both the hospital and almshouse. Gardens are frequently associated with almshouses. At Whittington's Almshouse the almspeople had a well and a cloister and a patch of open ground next to St Michael Paternoster Church for their use.<sup>89</sup> Gardens and cloisters were also supplied for the use of the almspeople at St Katharine's and Henry VII's. The Countess of Kent's Almshouse and St Augustine Papey did not have cloisters, but did have the use of a garden, and the almspeople at the Brewers' Almshouse maintained a garden in the courtyard at the Brewers' Hall.<sup>90</sup> St Bartholomew's hospital was also richly endowed with a garden, orchard and both large and small cloisters.<sup>91</sup> All these areas had multiple functionality, providing food and herbs for medicine, health for the body and peace and tranquillity for the soul.<sup>92</sup> Cloisters were particularly rich in spiritual symbolism. Used for cleansing (they often had a well in the centre), transition,

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<sup>86</sup> Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, p. 164.

<sup>87</sup> Moore, *The History of St Bartholomew's Hospital*, 2, p. 170.

<sup>88</sup> Moore, *The History of St Bartholomew's Hospital*, 2, p. 176.

<sup>89</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 112.

<sup>90</sup> Metcalf, 'William Porlond', p. 78.

<sup>91</sup> Moore, *The History of St Bartholomew's Hospital*, 2, p. 26.

<sup>92</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, 'Delectable Sightes and Fragrant Smelles: Gardens and Health in Late Medieval and Early Modern England', *Garden History*, 36.1 (2008), pp. 1-21.

meditation and prayer, they provided areas for gentle meditative, prayerful exercise and rest, suitable for use in most weathers, with positive effects on the accidents of the soul, ideal for the chronically sick, the elderly, or convalescent.<sup>93</sup>

Although the almshouses were founded for the elderly or impotent, those unable to earn their living, many almshouses provided opportunity for residents to engage in profitable occupations, both spiritually and, occasionally, monetarily. Residents at the Brewers' Almshouse were able to supplement their pensions by helping in the kitchen at company feasts or looking after chickens.<sup>94</sup> The poor Bedes women and sisters at St Katharine's Hospital were expected to assist the patients in the hospital, but this occupation was not rewarded with money.<sup>95</sup> The almspeople at Emmanuel Hospital (Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse) were expected to labour as they were able and were paid for their work.<sup>96</sup> This was very different from the patients at St Bartholomew's Hospital, who were not expected or able to perform work of this nature because they were acutely sick.

A balance between spiritual exercise and rest was also part of the daily routine. Not only were almspeople expected to participate in a sometimes-demanding round of prayer and praise, they were also expected to engage in spiritual education and spiritual rest or contemplation. As discussed in Chapter Three, education was a foundational charitable component of many almshouses with almspeople being expected to develop their spiritual knowledge and understanding. Rest, both physical and spiritual in the form of prayerful contemplation, was a feature of the regimen at many almshouses. Henry VII's ordinances take into account the almsmen's need for rest by allowing them to eat their suppers in their chambers, rather than in the refectory because of 'their great sondry ages.'<sup>97</sup> At Whittington's Almshouse the

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<sup>93</sup> P. Meyvaert, 'The Medieval Monastic Clastrum', *Gesta*, 12. 1 (1973), p. 55.

<sup>94</sup> Metcalf, 'William Porlond', p. 21. The employment of almspeople is discussed further in Chapter Seven, pp. 255-256.

<sup>95</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 73.

<sup>96</sup> *Parochial Charities of Westminster*, p. 63.

<sup>97</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 74r.

almsfolk were expected to spend the time between services in quiet study or contemplation.<sup>98</sup>

Bathing, as a form of rest and relaxation, can be thought of as medical therapy relating to exercise and rest. I have not found any records of new inmates being bathed at almshouses or at St Bartholomew's Hospital, but it is thought to have been a common practice in medieval hospitals. At St Giles's Hospital in Norwich, for example, patients went through a symbolic and practical cleansing on entry to the hospital, all their possessions were put away (to be returned at discharge), they put on clean clothes and thus cleansed, entered a semi-monastic regime described by Carole Rawcliffe as spiritual intensive care.<sup>99</sup>

The New Order at St Bartholomew's Hospital was clear that the patients were to be kept 'swete'.<sup>100</sup> Records show payments for juniper ashes to 'boocke' their clothes and the sisters were charged:

Ye shall also faithfully and charitably serve and helpe the poore in al their grieues and diseases, aswell by kepyng them swete and cleane as in gyueng thim their meates and drinkes after the moste honest and comfortable manner.<sup>101</sup>

The almoner was also charged with ensuring that the poor were kept sweet and clean.<sup>102</sup>

The medical requirement of bathing is explicitly laid out in the Rule of St Augustine, which ordered the lives of those living at Elsyngspital and many of the almshouses founded and run by religious organisations:

As for bodily cleanliness too, a brother must never deny himself the use of the bath when his health requires it. But this should be done on medical advice, without complaining, so that even though unwilling, he shall do what has to be done for his health when the superior orders it.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>98</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 112. See Chapter Six, pp. 198-204, for a more detailed discussion about study in the almshouse.

<sup>99</sup> Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, p. 105.

<sup>100</sup> Moore, *History of St Bartholomew's*, 2, p. 169, 174, 178.

<sup>101</sup> Moore, *History of St Bartholomew's*, 2, p. 174.

<sup>102</sup> Moore, *History of St Bartholomew's*, 2, p. 169.

<sup>103</sup> *The Rule of St Augustine*, Ch. V 5.

Therefore, it would be reasonable to assume that bathing was a therapy that was practised in at least some of the almshouses, especially when prescribed by a doctor or surgeon.

Confession was an essential part of the spiritual cleansing process. Battista Condronchi, a seventeenth-century Italian physician, argued that because confession alleviated the fear of mortal sin it could therefore be considered a 'physical medicament', the purging of sin cleansing the body, an essential first step on the path to renewed health.<sup>104</sup> Canon twenty-two of the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215 decreed that patients should be confessed by a priest before receiving the attentions of a physician.<sup>105</sup> At St Bartholomew's Hospital there were three or four chaplains in the thirteenth century to say Mass and care for the souls of the patients.<sup>106</sup> For people in almshouses who were not in hospital, confession would have been undertaken at least yearly in accordance with the canon law of the time.<sup>107</sup>

Coitus was also related to exercise. The *Isagoge of Joannitus* states that:

Sexual intercourse is beneficial for the body; it dries the body and diminishes the natural power and so cools it down, although oftentimes the body is warmed by a good deal of vigorous motion.<sup>108</sup>

Because of this, coitus could be prescribed for the young and proscribed for the old. As we have seen, the elderly, both men and women, were thought to have cold dry humours and in order to preserve health they needed warm dry therapies - increasing cold humours could cause an imbalance and make them sick. Coitus was also to be avoided by those whose vital facilities were weak, which ruled out the sick at St Bartholomew's Hospital. The rule at St Bartholomew's was concerned with the chastity of the nursing sisters, who were required to stay in the women's ward after seven in the evening and might only leave in extremis.<sup>109</sup> The reference to the women's ward

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<sup>104</sup> Gentilcore, 'Medical Pluralism in the Kingdom of Naples', p. 11.

<sup>105</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, I pp. 245-246.

<sup>106</sup> Moore, *History of St Bartholomew's*, 2 p. 7.

<sup>107</sup> See Chapter Two, pp. 58-60. On the role of catechism

<sup>108</sup> 'The Isagoge of Joannituius', p. 146.

<sup>109</sup> Moore, *History of St Bartholomew's*, 2 p. 172.

implies that, as was common throughout medieval Europe in the late-middle ages, the sexes were separated within the hospital.

Coitus is certainly one area where the medical philosophy of Galen came into conflict with the Church's understanding of sin in the Middle Ages. The rule of St Augustine is particularly severe about the perils of sexual desire:

Although your eyes may chance to rest upon some woman or other, you must not fix your gaze upon any woman. Seeing women when you go out is not forbidden, but it is sinful to desire them or to wish them to desire you, for it is not by tough or passionate feeling alone but by one's gaze also that lustful desires mutually arise.<sup>110</sup>

However, the ordinances of Whittington's Almshouse and many others display a somewhat ambivalent and contradictory attitude to this matter. Residents were to be men and chaste, but some with wives were allowed.<sup>111</sup> Several residents of Whittington's Almshouse who got married in the sixteenth century were then required to leave, but it is not recorded if this was because of money and property brought to the marriage or the act of coitus implied by the marriage bed. Single women were discouraged in Whittington's Almshouse, but in the sixteenth century several were admitted to help with looking after the sick and dress the meat.<sup>112</sup> The Brewers' Almshouse, in common with the majority of medieval almshouses in London, appears to have admitted people on the basis of need and there appears to be no effort to separate the sexes.<sup>113</sup> The Countess of Kent's, Lady Askew's, and Cornelius Van Dun's, were the only exclusively female almshouses I have found in London between 1330 and 1600, and the Countess of Kent's ordinances were very careful that the almswomen should preserve their chastity and honour.<sup>114</sup> The sisters at St Katharine's were required to live separately from the brothers and any contact between the sexes was supervised. The ordinances of St Katharine's were concerned that:

None of the brethren shall have any private interview or discourse with any of the sisters of the said house, or any of the other women within the said hospital

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<sup>110</sup> *The Rule of St Augustine*, Ch. IV 4.

<sup>111</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 52.

<sup>112</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 52.

<sup>113</sup> Metcalf, 'William Porlond', pp. 77-85.

<sup>114</sup> CCA, CL/G/Mss/Angell/5/21/23.



in any place that can possibly beget or cause any suspicion or scandal to arise therefrom.<sup>115</sup>

The other almshouses seem ambivalent on the issue of cohabitation. This may be that because of the age and infirmity of the residents it was not considered to be a problem, or perhaps the practical presence of wives to cook, clean and nurse was considered a greater benefit.

The separation of the sexes was often found in medieval hospitals, such as St Mary's Bishopsgate and St Bartholomew's Hospital, but was not reflected in many almshouses, where wives were frequently accepted into the almshouse with husbands. The only almshouses that did require separation of the sexes seem to be those that came from a medieval hospital tradition (such as St Katharine's) or those very few that were specifically for single women; we will return to this subject later in this chapter.<sup>116</sup>

### 5.2.5 Accidents of the Soul

The whole of the hospital and almshouse environment worked towards balancing the accidents of the soul, calming and quieting the mind, banishing fear and promoting tranquillity, confidence and a moderate cheerfulness, and the production of this healing state of mind was achieved using the tools of spirituality.

The first tool used in treating the accidents of the soul was beauty. In the late medieval period beauty was associated with health, virtue, cleanliness, sweetness and holiness, while ugliness equated with sickness, sin, dirt and evil.<sup>117</sup> Spiritual beauty was equated with living in harmony and charity with Christian brothers and sisters. The introduction to the Rule of Augustine talks about how living in charity and loving spiritual beauty enabled those brethren following the rule to imitate Christ to such an extent that they would emit his odour of holiness:

The Lord grant that you may observe all these precepts in a spirit of charity as lovers of spiritual beauty, giving forth the good odor of Christ in the holiness of

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<sup>115</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 71.

<sup>116</sup> City of London Livery Companies Commission, Report; 4 (London, 1884), p. 120; CCA, CL/G/Mss/Angell/5/21/23.

<sup>117</sup> Mary Carruthers, *The Experience of Beauty in the Middle Ages* (Oxford, 2013), p. 34.

your lives: not as slaves living under the law but as men living in freedom under grace.<sup>118</sup>

Beauty was also found within the environment of both the hospital and almshouse through the provision of gardens, cloisters, chapels, candles, icons and images of saints, the housing of relics and, importantly the Mass. Music was an important part of the worship at both almshouses and hospitals in London. The College of Priests, closely associated with Whittington's Almshouse, educated four boy choristers who were expected to sing in the Church of St Michael Paternoster.<sup>119</sup> As both the almshouse and the hospital followed the rule of St Augustine, the devotions of the *Opus Dei* may also have been chanted or sung. Music was also provided at Elsyngspital, Henry VII's, St Katharine's Hospital, St Anthony of Vienne, St Stephen Westminster, and St Michael Cornhill Almshouses. Even the smaller poorer almshouses could invest in music; Milbourne's Almshouse, for example, required that the daily Mass was sung.<sup>120</sup> The Countess of Kent's Almshouse ordinances required the wardens to find an honest poor man to live in one of chambers of almshouse and help friars or priests sing and say a commemorative Mass daily for the countess and her husband. However, in the interests of thrift the man was also to guard the gate to be opened and closed at the hours appointed by the countess.<sup>121</sup>

Peregrine Horden has suggested that the use of music may have been seen as a distinct form of therapy with the singing of psalms being particularly therapeutic.<sup>122</sup> The *Summa Musice*, a thirteenth-century manual for singers, states:

Music has medicinal properties and performs miraculous things. Music cures diseases, especially those that arise from melancholia and sadness ... Music calms the irascible, gladdens the sorrowful, dissipates anxious thoughts and destroys them, just as David the string player ... expelled the demon from King Saul when he was possessed by a devil.<sup>123</sup>

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<sup>118</sup> *The Rule of St Augustine*, Ch. VIII 1.

<sup>119</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 31.

<sup>120</sup> Milbourn, *Milbourne Almshouses*, pp. 139-152.

<sup>121</sup> CCA, CL/G/Mss/Angell/5/21/23.

<sup>122</sup> Horden, 'Religion as medicine', pp. 142, 147.

<sup>123</sup> *The Summa Musice*, ed. and trans. C. Page (Cambridge, 1991), p. 12.

This passage again demonstrates the absorption of Galenic humoral theory into the paradigm of Christianity. Melancholia, one of the four temperaments, is described as giving rise to disease, a statement which is justified by the biblical story of David calming King Saul.<sup>124</sup>

### 5.3 Caring for the Sick in the Almshouse

In terms of a hierarchy of healers within the hospital or almshouse, Christ was seen as the ultimate healer capable of healing anything for those people cleansed of sin and with enough faith. Priests, as mediators between the people and the divine, were therefore natural facilitators of healing. Theologians stressed that God put remedies for illness at man's disposal; these included all the strategies we have discussed above.<sup>125</sup> As a result of this it was common for the clergy to 'minister medically and spiritually' to patients.<sup>126</sup> The role of priests ministering medically to patients is demonstrated by the ordinances of Elsyngspital and St Katharine's Hospital. Both these institutions were the earliest almshouses in London and demonstrate elements of both hospitals and almshouses. Elsyngspital employed a brotherhood of priests to care for the sick almsmen (like a traditional medieval hospital), and St Katharine's continued to run a medieval hospital in the Church, with a brotherhood of priests, whilst also housing sisters and poor Bedeswomen in an almshouse. Both institutions had similar requirements for the priests. At Elsyngspital the brothers were instructed:

After Mass the warden and all the priests shall visit the sick lying in the hospital before the third hour and shall relieve their needs and mitigate their pains or cause them to be relieved or mitigated as far as they can.<sup>127</sup>

And at St Katharine's both the brethren and the sisters were directed to:

Visit the sick and infirm therein (the hospital), as well in reading to them as asking them questions in any matters of divinity as other works of charity.<sup>128</sup>

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<sup>124</sup> 1 Samuel 16.23.

<sup>125</sup> Gentilcore, 'Medical Pluralism in the Kingdom of Naples', p. 18.

<sup>126</sup> Cook, *Medical Market Place*, p. 32.

<sup>127</sup> Bowtell, 'A Medieval London Hospital: Elsyngspital 1330 – 1536', p. 259.

<sup>128</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 71.

In the first of these excerpts in particular, we can see the coexistence of spiritual and medical therapy in the institution and the role of the priests and sisters as both medical and spiritual advisers.

The priests of Whittington's College were to be removed to the almshouse if they became sick, where they would receive the same care as the other almspeople, presumably being visited and advised by their brothers from the adjacent college. Residents of Whittington's Almshouse were directed to look after each other.<sup>129</sup> The vast majority of medical treatment in the Middle Ages occurred in a domestic environment, so older women as well as priests would be expected to have some medical experience. Margaret Pelling was of the opinion that the stereotype of older women healers in the Middle Ages was that they knew more and did less harm than physicians.<sup>130</sup> Carole Rawcliffe suggested that older women in medieval hospitals and almshouses were considered knowledgeable enough to safely be left to care for the sick without further instruction.<sup>131</sup> Peregrine Horden supported this idea: he suggested that as managing the non-naturals was considered medical therapy, then the people who encouraged a healthy regimen were in a sense medical practitioners.<sup>132</sup>

The women at Whittington's Almshouse were expected to feed and care for the sick. In 1567 Jane Dryver, a widow, was admitted on the understanding that she would tend the sick and dress the meat.<sup>133</sup> Likewise poor women and a monk were employed at Henry VII's Almshouse to cook and care for the almsmen, an old man and his wife were employed at St Augustine Papey, and the sisters and poor Bedeswomen at St Katharine's were expected to care for each other when they were sick and assist the sick in the hospital.<sup>134</sup> The ordinances of St Katharine's state:

And if it shall fortune, that any one of the said poor women shall be sick or infirm, the sisters of the aforesaid hospital shall use all possible charity towards them and give them a constant and frequent attendance. And also that the poor

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<sup>129</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, pp. 35, 117.

<sup>130</sup> Pelling, 'Thoroughly resented', p. 68.

<sup>131</sup> Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, p. 170.

<sup>132</sup> Horden, 'Religion as Medicine: Music in Medieval Hospitals', p. 141; Pelling, 'Thoroughly resented', p. 70.

<sup>133</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 53.

<sup>134</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 44v; Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 71; Hugo, 'The Hospital of Le Papey', pp. 183-221.

women themselves shall assist in attending those who shall be sick as much as lies in their power.<sup>135</sup>

Occasionally a malady was beyond the ability of the women of the almshouse or the priests to treat, or it required surgical intervention. In these cases, the rule of St Augustine gave the following advice:

Finally, if the cause of a brother's bodily pain is not apparent, you must take the world of God's servant when he indicates what is giving him pain. But if it remains uncertain whether the remedy he likes is good for him, a doctor should be consulted.<sup>136</sup>

Traditionally, the clergy had also been involved in surgery, but this practice was forbidden by the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.<sup>137</sup> Barber surgeons were employed alongside physicians and clerics at St Bartholomew's Hospital, but there is very little evidence of their employment in almshouses except for two intriguing instances.<sup>138</sup> Firstly, a barber was engaged to attend the elderly and disabled priests who inhabited the almshouse of St Augustine Papey.<sup>139</sup> This would have been primarily to ensure the priests were regularly shaved and tonsured but barbers also provided surgical and medical help when required.<sup>140</sup> Secondly, in 1432 Mabel Sherwood, one of the residents of the Brewers' Almshouse, was recorded as continuing to receive her pension and her room was kept for her, while she lay sick in St Bartholomew's Hospital.<sup>141</sup> This implies that even poorer almshouses who didn't employ trained medical practitioners, were able to ensure their residents received skilled care if their condition was considered to require it.

Sometimes, extra nursing help was brought in when residents were particularly ill. In 1616, the Countess of Kent's Almshouse admitted Elizabeth Phillipps, a widow, to care for Joan Hall, who was 'lying sick and [could not] help herself'.<sup>142</sup> The other

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<sup>135</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 73.

<sup>136</sup> *The Rule of St Augustine*, Ch. 5 6.

<sup>137</sup> Cook, *The Medical Market Place*, p. 34; Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, I pp. 245-246.

<sup>138</sup> Moore, *The History of St Bartholomew's Hospital*, 2, p. 151.

<sup>139</sup> Hugo, 'The Hospital of Le Papey', p. 187.

<sup>140</sup> Margaret Pelling, 'Appearance and Reality: Barber-Surgeons, the Body and Disease', in A. L. Beier and R. Finlay eds., *London 1500-1700: The Making of the Metropolis* (London, 1986), p. 83.

<sup>141</sup> Metcalf, 'William Porlond', p. 83.

<sup>142</sup> CCA, Court Orders, CL/B/1/5, f. 217v.

almswomen were not expected to care for Joan Hall, or perhaps they were not able to help in this case. However, Elizabeth Phillipps was admitted as an almswoman and so must have stayed at the Countess of Kent's Almshouse after Joan Hall's recovery or death.

Whittington's Almshouse is the only establishment in this study where the indentures require the removal of an almsman from the house if he was leprous, mad or with 'intolerable sickness'.<sup>143</sup> However, this may have also been the practice in other establishments. At Whittington's Almshouse care and treatment and suitable adjustments to the regimen of prayer and praise were also provided for in the case of an almsman's sickness. The clause also states that no mad, leprous, or infected persons should be admitted to the house, so the term 'intolerable sickness' in this case might be used to refer to these conditions. I cannot find any evidence that this clause was invoked for a resident almsman.

The skill of almswomen in tending the sick was clearly understood in Westminster in the late sixteenth century. Two almshouses, Cornelius Van Dan's and Lady Anne Dacre's, clearly expected the almswomen to be proficient in tending the sick and young. The Indentures of Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouse in Westminster stipulated that his almshouse should be for:

...the relief succouring and harbouring of eight poor women, who in time of sickness, as need should require, might help to keep and attend such as should be diseased within the parish of St Margaret, Westminster.<sup>144</sup>

The almswomen were clearly expected to have the skills to look after the sick, but also there seems to be an element of spiritual duty and perhaps expendability here, in that the elderly poor women would be expected to look after those who no one else wanted to go near for fear of catching the disease. Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse also expected their female residents to be adept at caring for the sick and infants. Able-bodied female residents were expected to care for their peers within the almshouse, but also each tiny house within the almshouse was expected to foster an orphaned

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<sup>143</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 118.

<sup>144</sup> *Endowed Charities*, p. 275.

child of the parish, and a school was also planned on the site to educate the orphans when they were old enough.

Residents of the almshouse, particularly female residents, were therefore expected to be capable of ably ministering to the sick, diseased, injured, and aged. This ministrations combined with the knowledge of the parish priest was sufficient for the treatment of most of the disease that occurred within the almshouse. However, when a malady occurred that was beyond the skill of the women or the priest then help could be brought in or the individual could be sent somewhere else for treatment.

## 5.4 Conclusion

There is evidence, therefore, that almshouses did indeed provide a sophisticated and fully integrated medical and spiritual environment. Consequently, both hospitals and almshouses can be viewed as a vehicle for promoting health in body and soul primarily through religion and the management of the non-naturals.

Hospitals and almshouses were similar in that both provided bodily and spiritual therapy in terms of the provision of care to both maintain and restore health, through the medium of the non-naturals. The main differences between the two institutions were centred around the health of the residents. People in hospitals such as St Bartholomew's were usually acutely ill and in need of intensive bodily and spiritual medicine and often in mortal danger, though this could be temporary as people did recover and leave St Bartholomew's Hospital. Almspeople, however, were more usually chronically sick or aged, but not acutely ill and able to care for themselves upon entry to the almshouse. They were expected to participate actively in the spiritual work of an almshouse, physically attending church and as an important actor within the ceremony, whereas the residents of medieval hospitals were more passive in their participation, except for leprosy hospitals where the residents also participated actively in services. Residents of almshouses were, on entry to the almshouse, often too poor or incapacitated to work for a living, but able-bodied enough to say their Paternoster and physically walk to the church, participate in services and occasionally take on small paid roles to supplement their income. They were then able to live in an environment that was prepared to care for them until their deaths.

The non-naturals were manipulated in the almshouse for the wellbeing of the residents using the architecture of the building, food preparation and the spiritual activity of the residents. The almswomen provided most of the physical care required within the almshouse, but other medical practitioners could be called in if necessary and occasionally residents might be sent away to receive specialist care at a suitable place. Almshouses were therefore sophisticated vehicles which provided spiritual and bodily therapy aimed at improving the health of the body and soul of both the founders and the residents through spiritual therapy and the balance of the non-naturals. They created an environment where individuals could end their days with honour and comfort and maximum bodily health. Preparation for death was also a core part of the almshouse spiritual therapeutic regimen. In the next chapter we will examine the role of the almshouses in preparation for death, the last pilgrimage of the soul.



## Chapter Six: Living in an Almshouse: Pilgrimage of the Soul

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye  
may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man  
availeth much.<sup>1</sup>

Almshouses, like medieval hospitals, used spiritual therapy and medical therapy based on the non-naturals to help residents regain, or maintain, their health. Both hospital and almshouse were liminal places on the bridge between life and death. However, for elderly or impotent people in the City of London and Westminster the experience of living in an almshouse was quite different to entering a medieval hospital to seek a cure or living out your days in poverty in the city. At the heart of this difference was a developing understanding of the nature of internal pilgrimage and the resulting focus on privacy, study, and prayer within the almshouse.

I will argue that almshouses were mediums for a pilgrimage of the soul; an internal pilgrimage that enabled the almsfolk to prepare for a good death.<sup>2</sup> As this chapter will show, pilgrimage was an ancient and popular practice, and pilgrimage to small local shrines and hospitals slowly declined during the fifteenth and sixteen centuries until its ultimate demise at the Dissolution.<sup>3</sup> As a result of this the geography of pilgrimage became more dependent on internalised spiritual pilgrimages, the focus moved from hospitals outside the city to almshouses, a specialised form of hospital provision, usually inside the city, where poor, ordinary people were able to take their own moral and spiritual pilgrimage towards death and the heavenly Jerusalem.

As vehicles for private pilgrimage and the preparation for death, almshouses embraced the need for solitude and privacy to such an extent that it was built into the fabric of the almshouse. This was quite unlike the experience of privacy and community in the normal urban environment. In order to take such a pilgrimage of the soul and prepare for the last judgment, almspeople had to pray and study; to do that they needed

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<sup>1</sup> James 5. 16 KJV.

<sup>2</sup> Appleford, *Learning to Die in London*, pp.55-73.

<sup>3</sup> See section 6.1: Pilgrimage and the almshouse.

privacy and solitude which I will argue was demonstrated by the provision of single dwelling spaces, gates, keys, private heating and privies.

The second part of this chapter seeks to establish the balance between autonomy and dependence experienced by almspeople. Entering an almshouse was not the only option for elderly and impotent people in late-Medieval and Tudor London. Other options were available and not everyone was suited to the rigorous spiritual life of the almshouse. I will argue that the almspeople enjoyed a measure of control and respect within the almshouse. This was demonstrated by the names given to early almspeople in the foundation documents, the way their communities were largely self-managed, the rate of and reactions to bad behaviour in the almshouse, the provision of pensions and benefits and the ability of almspeople to act with independent charitable agency within the almshouse.

## 6.1 Pilgrimage and the Almshouse

Pilgrimage has a long history; Diana Webb records that there were pilgrims in England before there were Christians. Christian pilgrimage, therefore, constitutes a continuity of behaviour from ancient times.<sup>4</sup> Going on pilgrimage involved entering a liminal state, where individuals were separated from their normal, worldly concerns and instead set their eyes and heart on God. Self-abnegation and the abandonment of familiar ties were a core facet of a pilgrimage.<sup>5</sup> As a sign of this separation from everyday life, pilgrims traditionally wore badges and distinctive clothing that demonstrated their essential poverty before God, and before starting they were expected to settle any debts or grievances with those they left behind.

There were many reasons why medieval people wanted to go on a pilgrimage, including obtaining indulgences, to find healing and an expression of repentance. The awarding of indulgences for pilgrimage became popular from the twelfth century, when penitential discipline was extended to all Christians through the medium of the Fourth Lateran Council in 1215.<sup>6</sup> This was combined with a growing belief in purgatory. Purgatory, a place where souls went following death to do penance for sins committed

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<sup>4</sup> Diana Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England* (London, 2000), p. 1.

<sup>5</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. xiii.

<sup>6</sup> Tanner, *Decrees of the Ecumenical Councils*, I pp. 245-246.

on Earth, was thought to exist in real time.<sup>7</sup> Therefore an 'indulgence', time taken off penance in purgatory, was measured in days, weeks and years. The first plenary indulgence, which wiped out all penance, was issued by the Pope in 1095 to all those Christian souls who died on Crusade. By the end of the fourteenth century, shrines, such as Thomas Becket's in Canterbury, sought permission to grant their own indulgences.<sup>8</sup>

Going on a pilgrimage was also seen as a penitential activity and could be given as a penance by a priest during confession. Chaucer's 'Parson's Tale', one of the *Canterbury Tales* (completed by 1400), written about people on pilgrimage to Becket's tomb, is a treatise regarding sin, virtue, and penitence.

...and for he that shal be verray penitent, he shal first biwailen the sinnes that he hath doon, and steadfastly purposen in his herte to have shrift of mouthe and to doon satisfaccioun.<sup>9</sup>

Related to this act of penitence, pilgrimage was also often associated with those seeking healing at shrines and through the power of relics. R.C. Finucane found that nine-tenths of the miracles reported at English and European shrines between the twelfth and fifteenth centuries were cures of human illnesses.<sup>10</sup>

Chaucer also wrote of this link between pilgrimage and healing in the *Canterbury Tales*. The pilgrims wanted:

The holy blissful martyr for to seke  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.<sup>11</sup>

Pilgrims traveling to St Thomas Becket's shrine in Canterbury usually started from London. But London and Westminster were also places of pilgrimage. Westminster Abbey was the site of the shrine of Edward the Confessor. An inventory of St Paul's Cathedral in the City of London in 1245 mentions the presence of five shrines.<sup>12</sup> The tomb of St Erkenwald, Bishop of London 675-93, attracted many pilgrims, including

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<sup>7</sup> For a more detailed discussion on the nature of purgatory see Chapter Two, p. 52.

<sup>8</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. xv.

<sup>9</sup> Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, Jill Mann ed., (London, 2005), p. 777.

<sup>10</sup> Finucane, *Miracles and Pilgrims*, p. 59.

<sup>11</sup> Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, p. 3.

<sup>12</sup> John Schofield, *St Paul's Cathedral Before Wren* (Swindon, 2011), p. 46.

Henry V who stopped to offer prayers there on his return from Agincourt in 1415.<sup>13</sup> In 1245 St Paul's Cathedral also contained a shrine to Bishop Melitus, King Ethelbert and Archbishop Ælfheah or Alphege of Canterbury, who was murdered by the Danes in Greenwich in 1012.<sup>14</sup>

The expression of pilgrimage in hospitals and almshouses was different. The sick frequently made pilgrimages to hospitals in hopes of obtaining healing. St

Bartholomew's Hospital, outside Aldersgate to the north-west of the City of London, was famous for its healing miracles. Many of these miracles were listed in the book of the founder Rahere, which was written a few decades after the foundation of the hospital in 1123. The beginning of Book Two described the scene in St Bartholomew's Church in the twelfth century:

Sick men, oppressed with diverse diseases, lay prostrate in the Church – while the lamps glowed redly on all sides - beseeching the divine clemency and praying for the presence of blessed Bartholomew. Nor in truth, was the mercy of God far from them, who is always present at the prayer of those that devoutly ask Him. For one man rejoices with a cry of jubilation that he has received remedy of his aching head, another the restoration of his lost walking powers, here a man rejoices free from ringing in the ears, there one from ulceration of the limbs; here one who has lost soreness of his eyes and received clearness of vision; many rejoice that they are soothed from the distress of fevers, and thunder praises to the honour and glory of the apostle.<sup>15</sup>

Eamon Duffy reports that it was usual for sick pilgrims to 'cluster round the shrines, sleeping on or near them for days and nights at a time, touching the diseased parts of their body to sacred stone or wood.'<sup>16</sup> St Bartholomew's Hospital contained some 'sacred wood' in the form of a relic of the Holy Cross. One of the miracles recorded tells of a poor woman with a swollen tongue who recovered after Rahere dipped the relic into water and used it to make the sign of the cross, on her tongue.<sup>17</sup> The *Book of the Foundation of the Church of St Bartholomew* relates that the hospital attracted sick

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<sup>13</sup> Bede, *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People* (Oxford, 2008), p. 183; Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 134; Schofield, *St Paul's*, p. 66.

<sup>14</sup> Schofield, *St Paul's*, p. 46.

<sup>15</sup> *The Book of the Foundation of the Church of St Bartholomew London*, p. 22.

<sup>16</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 198.

<sup>17</sup> *The Book of the Foundation of the Church of St Bartholomew London*, pp. 13-15, 20.

pilgrims both from the City of London and as far away as Norfolk, Northampton, Essex, Kent and Sussex.<sup>18</sup>

Early medieval hospitals were often mixed economy establishments, catering for the sick, poor, travellers and pilgrims. As we have seen, hospitals usually consisted of a chapel and nave, with the sick poor lying in beds or on pallets in the nave, bathing in the healing radiance of the Host on the altar.<sup>19</sup> The early hospitals of London followed the usual pattern for such establishments in that they were placed at the margins of the town, away from centres of economic and political activity, outside or close by the town walls.<sup>20</sup> This geographical placement facilitated their interaction with travellers and pilgrims. It also emphasised their liminality, their sense of otherness, occupying a concrete topographical space outside the everyday and the marketplace. These institutions were outside the city, at the start or the end of a journey, on the way to the city, or to somewhere else. The liminality of the hospital geography was shared by both hospital residents and pilgrims in general. As A. J. Davis suggested: 'like transitional personae in other societies, hospital inmates, who lived between states, had no real status or property.'<sup>21</sup>

Before 1300, hospitals had a wide variety of functions. However, over the course of the fourteenth century hospitals gradually began to be more specialised. Attitudes to poverty changed and the facilities for pilgrims and poor travellers were reduced or curtailed. St Katharine's hospital demonstrates this change. In 1354 Queen Philippa oversaw a redevelopment of the hospital during which time a college for priests and a choir school were added, along with an almshouse for poor bedeswomen and sisters. The shelter of pilgrims and the indigent poor had ceased to be the prime focus of their activities.

Later, in the fifteenth century, St Bartholomew's Hospital also became more specialised: it became more restrictive about who would be admitted and began to

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<sup>18</sup> *The Book of the Foundation of the Church of St Bartholomew London*, pp. 13, 17, 26-28, 32-36, 38.

<sup>19</sup> Chapter Five, pp. 155-6.

<sup>20</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, 'The earthly and spiritual topography of suburban hospitals', in Kate Giles and Christopher Dyer, eds., *Town and Country in the Middle Ages: Contrasts, Contacts and Interconnections, 1100-1500*, The Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph, 22 (Leeds, 2005), p. 253. Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 107.

<sup>21</sup> Davis, 'Preaching in Thirteenth-Century Hospitals', p. 89.

specialise in treating the sick. This increasing specialisation was signposted by pensioner and cleric Johannes De Mirfield (died 1407), who lived at St Bartholomew's Hospital and collected texts relating to spirituality and the practice of medicine. He wrote the *Breviarium Bartholomæi*, a medical work, concerned with diagnosis, treatment, and prognosis, and the *Florarium Bartholomæi*, which concerns itself with medical and spiritual matters.<sup>22</sup>

In 1535, Robert Copland, an English printer and author, published 'Highway to the Spyttlehouse', based upon a pre-Reformation French text *Le Chemin de l'ospital* (1505) by Robert de Balsac.<sup>23</sup> Copland adapted the poem to illuminate the problems associated with hospitals in mid sixteenth-century London. In it he described the queues of impoverished people waiting at the gatehouse and hoping to be allowed to spend the night at a London Hospital. Copland described two types of people seeking help, the deserving sick poor and the undeserving poor. However, pilgrims and those in pursuit of healing miracles do not appear on the list of those who deserved help from this hospital. Which leads to the question - what happened to pilgrimage?

The gradual decline of pilgrimage in the fifteenth century appears to originate with the restrictions in movement of the wandering poor. After the Black Death in 1348 the Ordinance of Labourers (1349) sought to prevent poor people from moving around the country to seek higher wages.<sup>24</sup> Over the next 200 years there followed a variety of legislation that sought to punish vagrants and control the movement of the poor.<sup>25</sup> This legislation developed as the concerns over movement changed from a desire to control wages to anxiety about the cost of providing poor relief. From the advent of the plague onwards the mobility of the poor was a subject of anxiety to the rich and powerful. The wandering poor came to be regarded with suspicion, lest they become a burden to the parishes they visited.

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<sup>22</sup> Johannes De Mirfeld of St Bartholomew's, *Smithfield: His life and works*, Percival Horton-Smith Hartley and Harold Aldridge eds. (Cambridge, 1936). Faye Getz, *Medicine in the English Middle Ages* (Princeton, 1998), pp. 49, 53.

<sup>23</sup> Orme and Webster, *The English Hospital*, p. 152.

<sup>24</sup> A. E. Bland, P. A. Brown, and R. H. Tawney, *English Economic History Selected Documents* (London, 1930), pp. 164-167.

<sup>25</sup> For more information on the legislation that attempted to regulate the poor in this period see Chapter Two, pp. 72-78.

One of the main problems for poor pilgrims with the imposition of the poor laws, was related to their image; how they appeared to the people they passed in the lanes and streets. Poorer pilgrims went on foot and often wore simple clothes. The Worcester pilgrim, whose grave was discovered in Worcester Cathedral in 1986, was dressed for walking, with a plain woollen gown and leather boots.<sup>26</sup> Pilgrims humbled themselves as an act of contrition for their sins. This meant that it could sometimes be difficult for bystanders to distinguish between pilgrims, the wandering poor, and vagrants.<sup>27</sup> This was a problem for poor pilgrims on foot. The *OED* defines vagrants as:

One of a class of persons who having no settled home or regular work wander from place to place, and maintain themselves by begging or in some other disreputable or dishonest way; an itinerant beggar, idle loafer, or tramp.<sup>28</sup>

However, this definition fails to convey the hostility and fear implicit in the use of the term in the fifteenth century. Linda Woodbridge records that: '[the term] "vagrant" had in its own day a menacing quality reflecting the age's deep-rooted suspicion of mobility.'<sup>29</sup>

The danger of being mistaken for a vagrant could result in a pilgrim being ignominiously ejected from a town and denied sustenance. Even worse, under the terms of the 1494 Act against Vagabonds and Beggars, suspected vagrants could be punished by being placed in the parish stocks for three days.<sup>30</sup>

During the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the continuing wars with France and worries about disease added to the levels of anxiety and suspicion relating to poor travellers. Records relating to concern about the mobility of the pilgrims in London can be found from 1353. The City of London's Letter-book G records three writs forbidding pilgrims to leave the realm without the King's special licence.<sup>31</sup> In 1375 a proclamation

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<sup>26</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 210.

<sup>27</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. xiv.

<sup>28</sup> *OED*.

<sup>29</sup> Linda Woodbridge, *Vagrancy, Homelessness, and English Renaissance Literature* (Illinois, 2001), p. 27.

<sup>30</sup> Beier, *The Problem of the Poor in Tudor and Early Stuart England*, p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Reginald Sharpe, ed., *Calendar of Letter Books of the City of London, Letter Book G 1352-1374* (London, 1905), pp. 19, 35, 217.

specifically identified pilgrims as one of the groups of people required to leave the City because of concerns about the transmission of disease:

Precept for mendicants, vagrants and pilgrims to leave the city by the morrow of St Laurence (10th August) under penalty of arrest; and that no leper beg in the streets for fear of spreading contagion.<sup>32</sup>

This proclamation grouped mendicants, pilgrims, and vagrants together. Each of these groups of people travelled around the country and therefore were the focus of concern as a vector for spreading contagion. In this climate, poor pilgrims' resemblance to vagrants may have led them to feel concerned about the welcome that awaited them in unfamiliar towns and villages and contributed to what Eamon Duffy described as pilgrims' neglect of some traditional English shrines in the years running up to the Dissolution.<sup>33</sup>

The growing mistrust of the travelling poor combined with a rise in cynicism about the holiness of pilgrims, the efficacy of relics in providing healing miracles, clerical corruption, and the abuse of indulgences.<sup>34</sup> This scoffing attitude was demonstrated by Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, a critical, comedic satire on the people who made pilgrimages, their behaviour and their motivations and the corruption of the Church.<sup>35</sup> William Langland (c.1370-1390) also satirised pilgrims in *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, characterising them as souvenir hunters, or work-shy pseudo-hermits.<sup>36</sup> Lollards were also scathingly critical of shrines and relics, counting them as akin to idolatry.<sup>37</sup> The Lollards were suppressed, but the criticisms remained. In the mid-fifteenth century Bishop Reginald Pecock thought the Lollard criticism had deterred people from pilgrimage.<sup>38</sup> These criticisms were growing louder and more powerful by the sixteenth century.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Sharpe, *Calendar of Letter Book G 1352-1374*, pp. 19, 35, 217.

<sup>33</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 195.

<sup>34</sup> Lillian M. Bisson, *Chaucer and the Late Medieval World* (New York, 1998), pp. 56-62.

<sup>35</sup> Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*.

<sup>36</sup> Langland, *Piers Plowman*, pp. 3-4, 58-59, 73, 89.

<sup>37</sup> Cronin, 'The Twelve Conclusions of the Lollards', p. 300.

<sup>38</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 251.

<sup>39</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 252.



St Erkenwald of St Paul's Cathedral is a good example of the slow decline in domestic pilgrimage before the Dissolution. St Erkenwald (died 693) was Bishop of London who is popularly credited with having converted Sebba, King of the East Saxons, to Christianity in 677. He was buried at St Paul's Cathedral, but by the eighth century he had become a popular local saint.<sup>40</sup> His popularity seems to have waxed and waned depending, to a great extent, on the enthusiasm and energy of the presiding Bishop of London. After 1087 his remains were translated into the cathedral and a shrine established by Bishop Maurice.<sup>41</sup> In 1245 the shrine of St Erkenwald was near the High Altar, a wooden shrine covered with silver plate and precious stones. A new shrine was built for St Erkenwald in 1313 in a prominent position behind the High Altar. However, as time went on, other areas of St Paul's, such as a statue of the Virgin Mary at the oratory of Roger de Waltham, became more popular sites of veneration.<sup>42</sup> During the fifteenth century St Erkenwald declined in popularity with pilgrims but rose in popularity with local fraternities and livery companies. In 1431 St Erkenwald's feast day was proclaimed as one of the four major feasts to be celebrated annually by the members of Lincoln's Inn. His cult became more confined to the local area. This may have been to do with a lack of impetus on the part of the clergy of the Cathedral, increasing mistrust of the organisations controlling the shrines and the chilling effect of Lollard criticism.<sup>43</sup> Or, perhaps the rising wealth of the companies in London made them a more lucrative target for funds than the erratic flow of poor pilgrims who, as we have seen, were suspected of spreading contagion. The shrine was finally destroyed during the Dissolution of 1538.<sup>44</sup>

The decline of pilgrimage to St. Erkenwald's tomb in the early fifteenth century was symptomatic of a slow general decline in domestic pilgrimage around this period.<sup>45</sup> Pilgrimage did not decline everywhere in England. St Thomas Becket's shrine in

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<sup>40</sup> Schofield, *St Paul's*, p. 45.

<sup>41</sup> Schofield, *St Paul's*, p. 66.

<sup>42</sup> Schofield, *St Paul's*, p. 125; Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 119, details a will which requests a pilgrimage to be made to the rood of the 'Northdore at Pawlis'.

<sup>43</sup> Veneration of shrines was attracting local Lollard criticism at St Paul's in London from the late fourteenth century: Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 97.

<sup>44</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 244.

<sup>45</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 249.

Canterbury remained 'uniquely' popular until it was dismantled in September 1538.<sup>46</sup> Pilgrimage became focussed on a smaller number of popular shrines in England. John Haywood, a palmer, listed the famous English shrines he had visited as a pilgrim in his play *The Four PP*, written in the early 1530s, none of which appear to be in hospitals.<sup>47</sup> The Dissolution, and the breaking up of shrines in the mid-sixteenth century finally stopped official pilgrimage in England. The spiritual value of pilgrimage remained, but in a changed form. One expression of this change manifested itself in the development of almshouses. The medieval almshouse was just as much an embodiment of a pilgrim's journey as the traditional medieval hospitals, but it was a spiritual internal journey rather than a physical external journey.

The concept of internal, spiritual pilgrimage was promoted in popular devotional books such as Walter Hilton's *Scale of Perfection* (c.1380):

It nedeth not to renne to Rome ne to Jerusalem for to seke Hym there, but turne thi thought into thyn owen soule, where He is hid.<sup>48</sup>

Chaucer's 'Parson's Tale' (c. 1387 - 1400), also described the metaphor of human life as a spiritual pilgrimage towards death and the heavenly city of Jerusalem.

...thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage  
That highte Jerusalem celestial.<sup>49</sup>

There was also no shortage of role models for this sort of internal pilgrimage. Hermits, anchorites, and monastic cloistered communities were common occurrences in late-medieval England and had been familiar from at least the fourth century: religious people, journeying in spirit, while standing still. Almshouses provided a way for ordinary people, without the means to support themselves, approaching the end of their lives, to embark on their own spiritual pilgrimage to the celestial Jerusalem.

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<sup>46</sup> Webb, *Pilgrimage in Medieval England*, p. 259.

<sup>47</sup> *The Plays of John Haywood*, Richard Axton and Peter Happe eds. (Cambridge, 1991), p. 113.

<sup>48</sup> Walter Hilton, *The Scale of Perfection* I, Thomas H. Bestul ed. (Kalamazoo, 2000) Ch. 49, Line 1429 - 1431.

<sup>49</sup> Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, 'Parson's Tale', p. 694.

As we have seen, the founders of almshouses were motivated by several factors.<sup>50</sup> These were mediated by an increasingly literate and educated body of merchants, skilled artisans and lower levels of gentry who were frustrated at the mismanagement of hospitals by the ecclesiastical and political authorities, and desired to take control of their own relationship with God. Sheila Lindenbaum argued that literate Londoners had to subvert their knowledge of theological issues and demonstrate them in other ways, such as the foundation of almshouses and colleges.<sup>51</sup> These were grand works of charity that demonstrated their knowledge and understanding of spiritual matters in a socially acceptable form. Almshouses embodied signs of commitment to a spiritual pilgrimage in a concrete form. This was demonstrated in the radical way the almshouses were organised and the way almspeople lived, which included learning, facilities for privacy, and the emphasis on penitence and prayer.

## 6.2 Pilgrimage of the Soul

The concept of ordinary people taking an internal, individual pilgrimage to the 'heavenly Jerusalem' was unusual in the early fourteenth century. A pilgrimage to the interior of one's soul involved preparation for death, prayer, contemplation, and learning, and consequently time spent in solitude. However, in the fourteenth century medieval norms held that it was customary for ordinary people to live in community with others and that individual, private and solitary activity (apart from professed religious people) was suspect. The writings of Reginald Pecock (mid-fifteenth century Master of Whittington's College) expressed this tension. He wrote about the need to keep the old ways and expressed confidence in miraculous healing, which could be attained from community-based activities, such as the pilgrimage to shrines. He also wrote a manual that aimed to teach poor, ordinary people how to develop their own individual spiritual life, in the privacy of their own souls.<sup>52</sup> Provision for privacy was apparent in many areas of almshouse life. Indeed, this is one of the key attributes that distanced life in the almshouse from life in an urban parish community. The desire for

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<sup>50</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 85-114.

<sup>51</sup> Lindenbaum, 'Literate Londoners and Liturgical Change', pp. 384-399.

<sup>52</sup> Reginald Pecock, *The Donet and The Poore Mennis Myrroure*, Elsie Vaughan Hitchcock ed. (London, 1921), pp. 203-205.

a good death, spiritual growth and learning and its attendant need for privacy was built into the fabric of almshouses for both rich and poor.

The regulations of Arundel Almshouse (1395) urged the blind or incapacitated residents to:

...learn to entertain their minds with prayer and meditation, to withdraw their affections from those objects from which time, or accident or disease, shall have begun to separate them, and to prepare themselves for that important change [death], of which their present misfortunes are intended to remind them.<sup>53</sup>

Almshouse ordinances in London and Westminster also implicitly embraced the need to prepare for death, both for the almspeople and others, in their directions for participation in religious services and intercessory prayer (see figure 5.2 in Chapter Five above). The requirement for the recitation of the psalm *De Profundis* is one of the most striking similarities between the almshouse ordinances. *De Profundis*, Psalm 130, was of great significance in the late-medieval era. The opening words of Psalm 130, 'Out of the depths I have cried to you', were associated with souls crying out for help in purgatory. It was chanted during sickness and deathbed vigils, as preparation before the sacrament of Extreme Unction and during the Placebo and Dirige - the services of Vigil and Matins that were said the night and morning before a funeral.<sup>54</sup> *De Profundis* is one of the seven penitential psalms and also one of the gradual psalms said during pilgrimage, which made it uniquely appropriate for a person approaching death, the last journey or pilgrimage of repentance. *De Profundis* was so strongly associated with purgatory that it was excluded from the King's primer published by Richard Grafton in May 1545.<sup>55</sup> Some previous scholars have described the daily round of prayer and services required of almshouse residents as a form of hard labour. Miri Rubin suggested that almspeople were merely 'liturgical appendages', and Colin Richmond compared the rigorous routine of prayer in the almshouse to Victorian sweatshops or

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<sup>53</sup> M. A. Tierney, *The History and Antiquities of the Castle and Town of Arundel* 2. (London, 1834), pp. 666-7.

<sup>54</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 446.

<sup>55</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 445.

factories.<sup>56</sup> On the contrary, I would argue that the daily repetition of *De Profundis* and involvement in liturgical services enabled almspeople to commune with the community of the dead, and constituted an essential part of their spiritual pilgrimage as they prepared for their own deaths.

To die unshriven, '*mors repentina*', was a great fear of medieval people, as death without warning was considered an indication of disfavour with God, and therefore something to be feared.<sup>57</sup> Duffy reported that many of the prayers said while Mass was being celebrated, pleaded with God to prevent them dying before receiving '*schryfte and howsele*'.<sup>58</sup> To die before attaining a state of grace achieved through confession and taking the last sacrament, meant that your soul was in peril. During the late-medieval period the end of life was considered to have a profoundly important impact on what happened to your soul. The moment of death was characterised as one when angels with the Virgin Mary and demons warred over your soul and the individual could control the outcome of this battle by personal mental and spiritual effort.<sup>59</sup> The rites of the deathbed, 'purification and separation, anointing and warning, cleansing and reconciliation',<sup>60</sup> were seen as essential to ensure that the individual died in a state of spiritual grace.

The preparation for death can also be viewed as part of the health regimen of the almshouse, as perturbation of the soul, disordered emotion and fear of death were seen as a key part of the process of death. The calm, quiet routine of prayer, praise and contemplation, spiritual education, living in charity with your neighbours, close association with a priest and the separation from the commonality of the parish within the bounds of the almshouse precinct, provided both daily therapy for this fear, and spiritual preparation for death. The close association with the parish church was an essential part of this therapy. The priest was an important participant in deathbed events: he processed to the house of the dying with the Host, interrogated the

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<sup>56</sup> Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 146. Colin Richmond 'The English Gentry and Religion, c. 1500', in C. Harper-Bill ed., *Religious Belief and Ecclesiastical Careers in Later Medieval England* (Woodbridge, 1991), pp. 121-150.

<sup>57</sup> Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, p. 10.

<sup>58</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 311.

<sup>59</sup> Danae Tankard, 'Attitudes to Death in England, c.1480-1560' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Birkbeck College, University of London 2002), p. 101.

<sup>60</sup> Binski, *Medieval Death*, pp. 29-30.

individual about the state of their soul, listened to confession, administered the last sacrament and pronounced absolution, removing the barriers of sin that separated the dying from salvation. Daily contact with a priest helped the almspeople to prepare for their own deaths and charitably assist the soul of the founder in purgatory.

A good death was not a solitary occupation. The presence of family and neighbours to make peace and to pray for the good of your soul was also essential, though something that was increasingly hard to find after the ravages of the Black Death and the following epidemics. Rawcliffe documents ninety epidemics, some of which lasted several years, between 1348 and 1530.<sup>61</sup> During the first wave of pestilence in England there was such a shortage of priests to hear final confession of the dying that laymen and women were given a mandate to perform the office.<sup>62</sup> Priests were not only disproportionately affected by the Black Death, they also succumbed in the plague outbreaks that followed, leaving very few ordained chaplains to fill an alarming number of parish vacancies, and the numbers of priests in the country remained low until the 1460s.<sup>63</sup> Many people, including Duffy, have stressed the importance of the presence of people praying for the soul of the departed at this critical point of transition from life to death.<sup>64</sup> Ariès speaks of the importance of Masses being said from the onset of the death agony through the transition to death and beyond for the well-being of the soul.<sup>65</sup> One of the benefits of living in an almshouse may have been that it provided a surrogate family, who could be relied upon to perform this service for fellow residents at the end of life.

There was no shortage of texts advising lay people how to prepare themselves and their neighbours for death.<sup>66</sup> They were common and increasingly available to all, through the medium of printing, as the fifteenth century progressed.<sup>67</sup> A good death, as described by the popular early fifteenth-century work *Ars bene moriendi* involved a process of self-examination, the overcoming of temptation, confession of sin and

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<sup>61</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, pp. 362-374.

<sup>62</sup> C. Harper-Bill, 'The English Church and Religion after the Black Death', in W. M. Ormrod and P. G. Lindley eds., *The Black Death in England* (Stamford, 1996), p. 84.

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, pp. 84-89.

<sup>64</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 323.

<sup>65</sup> Ariès, *The Hour of Our Death*, pp. 108, 173.

<sup>66</sup> Appleford, *Learning to Die in London*, pp. 4-5.

<sup>67</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 315.

repentance.<sup>68</sup> It was an important phase which enabled the individual to make peace with his neighbour and most importantly God, to settle his earthly affairs, to repent his sins and prepare his soul for eternity. A good death took time: separation, education, contemplation, prayer, and professional advice from a priest, all of which were available to almshouse residents. The *Ars bene moriendi* starts with an explanation of why it was essential to prepare for death:

Of all terrible things, the death of the body is the most terrible, however by no means can it be compared to the death of the soul ... Therefore since the soul has such a great value, in order to ensure its everlasting death the devil attacks a man in his final sickness with the greatest temptations; for this reason, it is very necessary that man provide for his soul let it be destroyed in death. For that purpose it is very important that everyone should have the art of dying well.<sup>69</sup>

In order to prepare for a good death, almshouse residents needed to engage in study and contemplation. The relationship between learning and the almshouse is one that has often been overlooked. Perhaps this is due to modern-day perceptions of the incongruity of poor, old, impotent people wanting to study and learn. Nevertheless, almspeople's footsteps along the path of spiritual pilgrimage were implicitly encouraged by the architecture of the almshouse. Residents had individual living accommodation that often included a living and sleeping space. Whittington's Almshouse ordinances emphasise the relationship between the almshouse and the monastery by calling these dwelling places a 'celle'.<sup>70</sup> Monastic cells are places used for study, prayer, rest, and contemplation. Almshouses also emphasised the worthiness of these activities. A journey to a spiritual Jerusalem requires a guide, and therefore learning and education were foundational aspects of many almshouses in the medieval and Tudor periods.

We have already seen that many almshouses were founded with grammar schools, choir schools, colleges for priests and several funded students at University, and so they existed within a community dedicated to study and reflection as well as prayer

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<sup>68</sup> Jeffrey Campbell, 'The Ars Moriendi, an examination, translation and collation of the manuscripts of the shorter Latin version' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Ottawa, 1995), p. 18.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, p. 21.

<sup>70</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 112.

and praise.<sup>71</sup> Almshouses built with schools in London included: St Katharine's Hospital, which by 1354 included a college, hospital, choir school and an almshouse; Whittington's Almshouse which was built with a College of Priests and a small choir school (1424); St Anthony of Vienne, which by 1499 had an almshouse and a choir school; Westminster School (1560), which included an Almshouse for twelve poor old men; Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse (1595), which included a school for children. This trend continued into the seventeenth century, with the new foundation of Charterhouse School (1611), which comprised a school and an almshouse.<sup>72</sup>

The association between schools and almshouses was even closer outside London. Almshouses such as Ewelme (Oxfordshire, 1437), Trinity Hospital Pontefract (1385), Gibson's (Stepney, 1536), Whitgift's (Croydon, 1596), and Dulwich (1616), to name just a few, were all built with attached schools.<sup>73</sup> The apparent lack of schools attached to almshouses in the City of London may be due to an agreement forged in 1446 between the Archbishop of Canterbury and Henry VI, that there should only be five grammar schools within the city.<sup>74</sup> This may have dissuaded almshouse founders from also building schools in the City. Indeed, when Andrew Judd founded an almshouse in London in 1550, he also established a school, but outside London, in Tonbridge, Kent.<sup>75</sup>

Many almshouses were also associated with collegiate communities of priests. In London and Westminster these included: Whittington's Almshouse, St Anthony of Vienne, St Katharine's, Elsyngspital, St Mary Bishopsgate, Henry VII's Almshouse at Westminster and Lady Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse at Westminster. Some almshouses, especially those for aged or impotent priests, were hard to distinguish from colleges, including Jesus Commons and St Augustine Papey.

As discussed previously, the close association of almshouses with education was partly due to a desire on the part of the founder of the almshouse to create a single

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<sup>71</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 90-93.

<sup>72</sup> Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, p. 207.

<sup>73</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, 'The Eighth Comfortable Work: Education and the Medieval English Hospital', in C. M. Barron and J. Stratford eds., *The Church and Learning in Later Medieval Society* (Donnington, 2001), pp. 371-398. Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, p. 212.

<sup>74</sup> A. F. Leach, ed., *Educational Charters and Documents 598-1909* (Cambridge, 1911), pp. 416-18.

<sup>75</sup> *Endowed Charities*, p. 423.

<sup>75</sup> TNA PROB 11/42A/ 493 (1558): Andrew Judd's Will.



institution that embraced as many of the works of spiritual and bodily mercy as possible.<sup>76</sup> However, the emphasis on learning in almshouse foundations was not restricted to young in school, adolescents in college, or older scholars. It also encompassed the elderly, poor and impotent members of the almshouse, who were often encouraged to take part in spiritual educational instruction by the head of the almshouse, who was sometimes styled 'tutor'. The 'principalle' of the poor folk at Richard Whittington's Almshouse was to be called the 'Tutor' and he was instructed to look after:

...ye husbandrie of ye same house in as mucche as he may goodly oversee dispose & ordeyne. Enforsing hym selfe to edifie and norissh charite and peas amonge his felawes and also to shew with alle besinesse bothe in word and deed ensamples of clenness and virtue.<sup>77</sup>

The Tutor at Whittington's almshouse (who was also an almsman) was to educate using both word and deed, to nourish charity and peace among his fellow almspeople and to teach them how to achieve spiritual purity ('clennesse') and virtue, essential qualities for pilgrims. Other wealthier almshouses in London and Westminster at this time, the ones for which the most detailed information remains, also emphasised the role of the head of the almshouse as a teacher. The priest in charge of Henry VII's almshouse was to be one of the almsmen: 'oon of theym beyng a preste at the tyme of his admission a good gramarien and of good name', and able to lead the men in their prayers'.<sup>78</sup> At St Katharine's Almshouse the sisters (who were from a more affluent background) were expected to read to the poor bedeswomen in the almshouse.<sup>79</sup>

The majority of almshouses for which records survive specify admittance to people from a specific community who were usually poor, chaste, pious, and honourable. Richard Whittington's Almshouse specifies that a resident should:

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<sup>76</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 81-93.

<sup>77</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 110.

<sup>78</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498 59v.

<sup>79</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, pp. 71- 73.

...be meek of spirit and destitute of temporell goodes in other places by the whiche he might competently lyve al be hit he were none of ye noumbre of ye seide Almsehouse Chaste of his bodie & named of good conversacion.<sup>80</sup>

These are all qualities that would describe an ideal pilgrim. The residents of Whittington's Almshouse were also expected to conduct themselves quietly when not worshipping in Church and: '...occupie hem self in prayer or reding or in labor of hir hondes or in som other honest occupacion'.<sup>81</sup>

In stating that almshouse residents could occupy themselves with reading, it was clearly anticipated that at least some residents of Whittington's Almshouse would be able to read. This was not uncommon in wealthier almshouses. Henry VII's Almshouse at Westminster specified that almsmen should be literate:

poor man then hauyng no wif beyng lettred & at the lest can help a preste to syng & parfitely can saye the psalme of de profundis clamaui & being of th'age of fyvety yeres or aboue ...<sup>82</sup>

In 1540, the Countess of Kent specified that after her death preference for admission to her almshouse should be given to the poor widows of clothworkers, who were 'of good conversation and learned'.<sup>83</sup> In 1595 Lady Anne Dacre's admission criteria were more specific. She specified that residents should be able to say the Lord's Prayer, the articles of Faith and the Ten Commandments in English, and to have good character.<sup>84</sup> Elaine Phillips's study of almshouses in East Anglia found that these sorts of requirement were more common after the Dissolution.<sup>85</sup>

However, spiritual development and learning for almspeople appear to have been a prime aim of almshouses, not least because the more spiritually developed the almspeople were the more effective their prayers were: '...The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'.<sup>86</sup> Amy Appleford argued that almshouse regimens

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<sup>80</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 114.

<sup>81</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 112.

<sup>82</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 41v.

<sup>83</sup> CCA, Estate Records, CL/Estate/5/1A/5, Indenture between the Clothworkers' Company and Margaret, Countess of Kent, 14 July 1538.

<sup>84</sup> Charity Commission Report 31 May 1889, *Parochial Charities of Westminster* (London, 1890), p. 64.

<sup>85</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 67.

<sup>86</sup> James 5. 16 KJV.

emphasised the residents 'personal spiritual responsibility,' and encouraged the spiritual education of their residents.<sup>87</sup>

Spiritual development was both a private and a community experience in the almshouse. It occurred during the Mass, during confession, during private study, listening to reading by priests or literate almspeople and reading aloud during communal meals at some almshouses. Clearly the level of learning and study varied enormously, depending on the individual organisation, the health of the almsperson, and their levels of literacy or access to a willing reader. Consequently, both the priests serving the almspeople and the almspeople themselves often appear to have had access to books to guide them on their journeys. The majority of these libraries and records of these libraries were lost at the dissolution of the monasteries, but Carole Rawcliffe has found evidence of libraries at many pre-dissolution hospitals and almshouses.<sup>88</sup> Chained books donated to Saffron Walden Almshouse in Essex circa 1400, included: the *Pupilla oculi*, a popular late fourteenth century manual for confessors; extracts from the five books of Decretals; a composite volume containing the appendices to this great work of canon law issued, respectively, by Boniface VIII and Clement V; a book of divinity by St John Chrysostom; and, a commentary on the Book of Revelation (the 'postylle of the apocalypse').<sup>89</sup> The donors recorded that their gift was to be used by:

...alle the honesete pristys of the cherche of Walden' that be willyng to stodye laboure & travayle for the mannes soule<sup>90</sup>

These were exclusively for the use of the priests serving the almshouse, as the chains prevented the books from being removed.

However, it would appear that smaller almshouses in London, such as the Parish Clerks' Almshouse, also had access to books. The will of Sir Richard Dodd in 1515

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<sup>87</sup> Appleford, *Learning to Die in London*, pp. 68-75.

<sup>88</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, "'Written in the book of life': Building the Libraries of Medieval English Hospitals and Almshouses", *The Library*, 7 3 2 (2002), pp. 127-162.

<sup>89</sup> Francis W. Steer, 'The Statutes of Saffron Walden Almshouses', *Transactions of the Essex Archaeological Society*, 25 (1955-60), p. 189; Rawcliffe, 'Written in the book of life', p. 128.

<sup>90</sup> Steer, 'The Statutes of Saffron Walden Almshouses', p. 189.

records: ‘...to the Brotherhed of Clerkys a boke called *Bonaventura de Vita Christi* and 6s 8d...’<sup>91</sup>

This book, also known as *Speculum vitae Christi* (*Mirror of the Life of Christ*) was very popular in the late-Middle Ages, and included a biography of Jesus along with a commentary from the Church Fathers and spiritual instruction, meditations and prayers.<sup>92</sup> Carole Rawcliffe also records the gift of a book to the ‘holy men and women’ of Brown’s Almshouse in Stamford by one of its early chaplains, which implies that the residents of almshouses were at least occasionally willing and able to make use of such literature.<sup>93</sup> Rawcliffe is of the opinion that

The acquisition and widespread use of books were not confined to a handful of prestigious institutions endowed by the crown, baronage, or mercantile elite. But only these larger and richer houses undertook the range of pastoral, devotional, and liturgical activities that necessitated the creation of a working library.<sup>94</sup>

Almshouses in London and Westminster that had access to libraries like these included St Katharine’s Hospital Almshouse, St Anthony of Vienne and Elsyngspital. The last included in its library service books, works on canon law, medical works, such as *Secreta Secretorum*, *Floriarum Bartholomei*, *Liber Galieni et Ypocrat*, and many works on spiritual development.<sup>95</sup>

As befits those embarking on a spiritual pilgrimage, books in almshouses focussed heavily on spiritual health and development. Reginald Pecock, the first Master of Whittington’s College, which was closely connected with Whittington’s Almshouse (the two adjacent communities both prayed and ate together), was a scholar and a prolific writer of works designed to educate the laity in Christianity. He was tried for heresy in 1457, but before that he found the time to write several spiritual guides. *The Donet*, written in dialogue form, in English rather than Latin, was designed as a companion to another of his books, *The Reule of Cristen Religioun*. These two books along with *The*

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<sup>91</sup> Sir Richard Dode, *London Consistory Court Wills 1492-1547*, ed. Ida Darlington, London Record Society (London, 1967).

<sup>92</sup> Nicholas Love, *Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ, Full Critical Edition* ed. Michael G. Sargent, (Abingdon, 2005), p. 1.

<sup>93</sup> Rawcliffe, ‘“Written in the book of life”’, p. 129.

<sup>94</sup> Rawcliffe, ‘“Written in the book of life”’, p. 130.

<sup>95</sup> Rawcliffe, ‘“Written in the book of life”’, p. 139.

*Poore Mennis Myrrour* and *The Follower* were intended by Pecock as a comprehensive guide to spirituality and suitable for people of every stage of society and every degree of intelligence.<sup>96</sup> The first three books appear to have been written almost concurrently and circulated for several years before publication. Vaughan Hitchcock suggested that they were written before 1443, while Pecock was Master of Whittington's College.<sup>97</sup>

Chapter Twenty-One of Pecock's *The Donet* instructs readers how to pray.<sup>98</sup> This includes how to pray inwardly and outwardly, three forms of reciting the *Pater Noster*, using the *Pater Noster* with other words and liturgy and other forms 'devised by holy men'. He also proposed other books where these forms of prayer can be found, along with suggestions for inward prayers, following an earlier pattern in the book focussing on confession and repentance.<sup>99</sup> It is not unreasonable to suggest that the spiritual needs of the poor almspeople on a spiritual pilgrimage in Whittington's Almshouse inspired the creation of these works.

Many of the pre- Dissolution almshouses maintained a rhythm of daily prayer, like religious houses. They were usually built next to or close to the parish church or a purpose-built chapel, and residents were expected to attend services and pray for the founder, each other, and all Christian souls. These forms of daily routine, even after the Reformation, were recognisably a religious rule and the discipline involved in following this daily routine was instrumental in helping almspeople on their spiritual pilgrimage.

Eamon Duffy suggested that:

Medieval men and women were ...well aware of the symbolic value of pilgrimage as a ritual enactment and consecration of their whole lives, helping to interpret them as a journey towards the sacred.<sup>100</sup>

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<sup>96</sup> Reginald Pecock, *The Donet and The Poore Mennis Myrrour*.

<sup>97</sup> Reginald Pecock, *The Donet*, p.xvii; Wendy Scase, 'Pecock, Reginald', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (2004).

<sup>98</sup> Reginald Pecock, *The Donet*, pp. 202-207.

<sup>99</sup> Reginald Pecock, *The Donet*, pp. 201, 203-4, 207.

<sup>100</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 192.

Almsfolk were no different; they were often resident for years, even in early almshouses, and so, like the residents of leper hospitals, they had the time to perform the spiritual work necessary to prepare their souls for death, including performing charitable acts for their fellow almspeople in the form of caring for them and in the form of spiritual works of mercy, such as praying for others and comforting the afflicted. They were expected to live a life of moral pilgrimage, a daily life of obedient service to God and each other, seeking forgiveness for sins of themselves and others. They were expected to be role models, living sermons to the rest of the city, abiding in charity.

Prayer and contemplation require privacy. Privacy was a rare commodity in the Middle Ages, especially for the poor or less affluent. Diana Webb records that the practice of solitude was not only rare in the Middle Ages, but it was also viewed with suspicion and was 'regarded as abnormal'.<sup>101</sup> The only group of people who could reasonably seek solitude and privacy were individual religious people who became hermits or anchorites and withdrew (mostly) from the community. Even members of cloistered religious communities lived their lives in constant companionship (except for the Carthusians); solitude was seen as a vehicle for temptation, an opportunity for sin. But as Diana Webb points out, there is a difference between solitude and privacy.<sup>102</sup> The word solitude often has negative connotations relating to isolation or ostracism. The word privacy, however, also has negative connotations, but it refers to the 'taking away' of something or privation. Another early, mid fifteenth-century use of the word privacy had connotations of secrecy rather than our current meaning of the term.<sup>103</sup> In the twelfth century (1183-1196) Peter the Chanter wrote a manual of ethics, *Verbum abbreviatum*, which included three chapters on the difference between 'bad singularity' and 'good singularity', and the need to cultivate good company and avoid the influence of bad company.<sup>104</sup> He preached that 'bad singularity' involved the desire to stand out from one's peers and that the right way to live involved: 'a sense of

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<sup>101</sup> Diana Webb, *Privacy and Solitude* (London, 2007), p. xiii.

<sup>102</sup> Webb, *Privacy*, p. xv.

<sup>103</sup> *OED*.

<sup>104</sup> Webb, *Privacy*, p. 9.

community, humanity, sociability and association, from which singularity will separate us'.<sup>105</sup>

Monastic life also displayed a degree of tension with regards to privacy and community. Benedictine rules were designed to keep the monastery separate from the general community and self-sufficient, as much as possible, with regards to food, water and the necessities of life. Young and old monks were expected to sleep, work, pray and eat in community, but there was some leeway for abbots to have their own private rooms and especially for religious people to live away from the main monastery in hermitages. In the early twelfth century (1127) the Carthusian order developed a rule of life that involved a higher order of monks inhabiting individual little cells (or houses with little enclosed gardens) arranged around a cloister, in which they spent their lives working, praying, eating and sleeping on their own, only joining their fellow monks, on Sundays and feast days.<sup>106</sup>

The pursuit of privacy became an issue for the senior monks at Westminster Abbey in the late fourteenth century. They caused problems for the Infirmerer by taking rooms in the infirmary originally designed for the sick, in order to enjoy some private time on their own.<sup>107</sup> This practice was enabled by extensive rebuilding of the Westminster Abbey Infirmary following a fire in 1364/5 during which time they added a cloister with chambers for the care of the sick of the abbey.<sup>108</sup> This new building allowed for the privacy of the sick in the Abbey infirmary in the fourteenth century and mirrors the development of almshouses with single rooms and a trend to set up screens and then individual rooms within single hall hospitals.

So, life inside the monastery could sometimes accommodate privacy in terms of the need for solitude for prayer and study. Ordinary life in the city, however, was not so accommodating. Upper class men might be able to shut themselves away to study or ponder their business affairs. Upper class women might live secluded lives at least until marriage, but this did not mean solitude, rather close supervision, and escort in the

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<sup>105</sup> *Patrologia Latina*, ed. J. P. Migne, 205 (1855), pp. 205, 206; Webb, *Privacy*, p. 9.

<sup>106</sup> Glyn Coppack and Mick Aston, *Christ's Poor Men: The Carthusians in England* (Stroud, 2002), pp. 26-27.

<sup>107</sup> Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, p. 87.

<sup>108</sup> Harvey, *Living and Dying in England*, p. 89.

society of the family and trusted servants. Withdrawing rooms off the main hall for the private use of the family began to be added to upper class establishments only in the mid-twelfth century, but families still tended to dine with their servants and retainers in the great hall.<sup>109</sup> Diana Webb records that the beginning of interest in ‘upper class’ living spaces in literary genres began to develop around 1300.<sup>110</sup>

While these changes were taking place, life for artisans in the urban parish was a largely communal affair, but private spaces within dwellings of even more humble houses seem to have developed during the fourteenth and fifteenth century. Artisans and poorer merchants might live with their servants and apprentices behind the shop. The poor usually lived in a shared occupancy house, with a family, or extended family, sharing one room with very little opportunity for privacy or solitude.<sup>111</sup> George Duby and Phillipe Braunstein concluded that moves to greater privacy and individuality within lay households occurred in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, because there is more written evidence of private thoughts and ideas post-1350.<sup>112</sup> Philippe Ariès, however, wrote that the concept of privacy did not reach a level recognisable by modern people until the sixteenth century.<sup>113</sup> Sasha Roberts defines privacy as ‘a controlling act – the ability to choose your own companions or be alone’.<sup>114</sup> However, Lena Cowen Orlin found that though the possession of a personal closet became a symbol of privacy in common culture during the sixteenth century, the possession of a closet did not guarantee privacy.<sup>115</sup>

The difference between the life of the urban poor in the community and life in the almshouse was marked, especially in the mid-fourteenth and early fifteenth century. Life in the almshouse included both solitude and privacy. However, the level of discrepancy depended on the life the individual had led before entering the

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<sup>109</sup> Webb, *Privacy*, p. 1.

<sup>110</sup> Webb, *Privacy*, p. 98.

<sup>111</sup> Webb, *Privacy*, p. 113; Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, p. 203.

<sup>112</sup> Georges Duby and Phillipe Braunstein, ‘The Emergence of the Individual’, in George Duby ed., *A History of Private Life II, Revelations of the medieval World* (Cambridge Mass, 1988), p. 548.

<sup>113</sup> Philippe Ariès, ‘Introduction’, in Roger Chartier ed., *A History of Private Life III. Passions of the Renaissance* (Cambridge Mass, 1989), p. 5.

<sup>114</sup> Sasha Roberts, ‘Shakespeare “creeps into the women’s closets about bedtime”: Women reading in a room of their own’, in Gordon McMullan ed., *Renaissance Configurations: Voices/Bodies/Spaces 1580-1690* (Basingstoke, 1998), p. 33.

<sup>115</sup> Lena Cowen Orlin, *Locating Privacy in Tudor London* (Oxford, 2007), p. 324.



almshouse. As we have seen, almshouses were usually built for individuals within the same social group.<sup>116</sup> This is best illustrated by Richard Whittington's two almshouses: Whittington's Almshouse, which was for members of the Mercers' Company, who were not of the livery (so not rich merchants), and Whittington's Longhouse, which was built above a latrine, for the poor of St Martin Vintry parish.

The people who were eligible to live in Whittington's Almshouse were poorer members of the Mercers' Company and so probably originally lived behind their shop in the manner of artisans and poorer merchants described above. Therefore, moving into an almshouse may well have been a cultural shock. However, even small almshouses for the poor of the parish were built for individual occupancy. Thomas Cook's will specified that the people in his small almshouse were to: '...occupie to ecych of hem bi him silf an hous...'<sup>117</sup>

Even when the initial intention was an almshouse for men-only, married couples were often also admitted. Whittington's Almshouse was designed for:

...men alonly or of men or women to giddre after ye sad discretcion & good conscience of Thoverseers underwreet and conservatours of ye same house...<sup>118</sup>

Very few almshouses in London and Westminster between 1330 and 1600 were for single men or single women only. The vast majority catered for married couples. Of the thirty-two mixed sex almshouses (out of fifty-two), only one, Henry VII's almshouse, started as single sex for men and became mixed by the time of its re-foundation by Elizabeth I.<sup>119</sup> Of the remaining twenty almshouses ten remained single sex for men and seven for women and three are unknown. Therefore, in London and Westminster only 31 per cent of almshouses were single sex, while the overwhelming majority, 62 per cent, were mixed sex.

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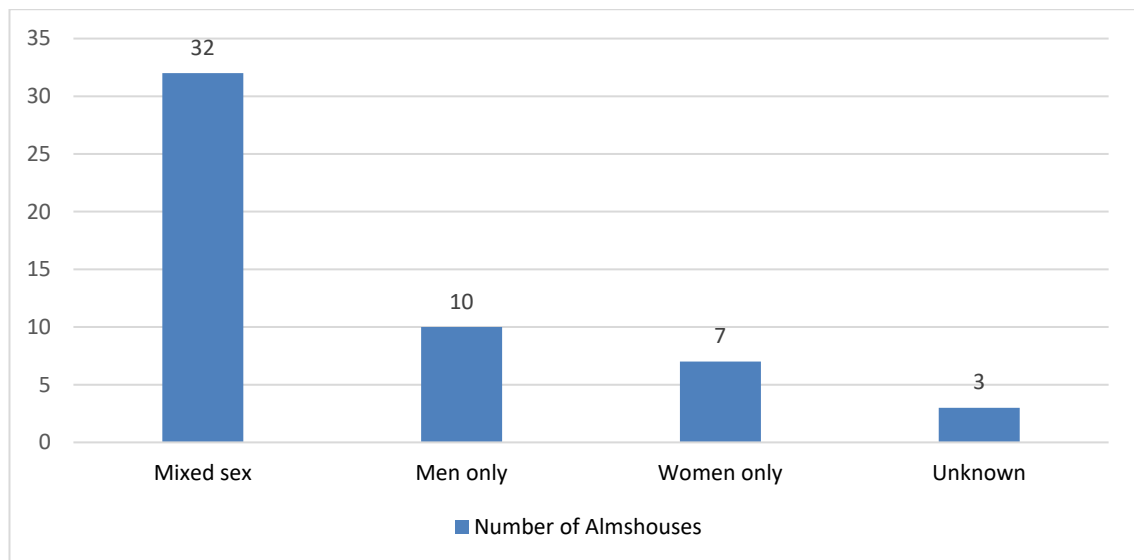
<sup>116</sup> See Chapter Three, p. 97. On the types of people in the almshouse.

<sup>117</sup> Sir Thomas Cook's will TNA, PROB 11/6/467 (36 Wattys).

<sup>118</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 110.

<sup>119</sup> Fox, 'The Royal Almshouse at Westminster', pp. 195, 218.

Figure 6.1: Sex of residents in Almshouses in London and Westminster 1330 - 1600



This is quite different to the pattern found by Marjorie McIntosh. She found that the balance of almshouse places in late-medieval and early-modern England as a whole was weighted towards men. Of the 1,005 almshouses identified by McIntosh for the period 1350–1600, 34 per cent of almshouses were allocated to men only, 24 per cent to women only, and 42 per cent were available to both sexes.<sup>120</sup> Martha Carlin also records that almshouses in England heavily favoured men.<sup>121</sup> Northern and southern Europe, however, demonstrated a marked preference for assisting widows. This is easier to understand as there are many biblical exhortations to help poor widows and orphans.<sup>122</sup>

The reason for the emphasis on married couples in London and Westminster is difficult to ascertain. This was not something that developed over time; the initial stated preference of almshouse founders in London was for mixed almshouses of men and women, sometimes married couples, sometimes individual men, and women. The presence of women was certainly seen as beneficial even in male-only almshouses. In Henry VII's almshouse three women were housed from the beginning to do the washing and look after the almsmen.<sup>123</sup> St Augustine Papey also employed a man and

<sup>120</sup> McIntosh, *Poor Relief in England*, p. 12.

<sup>121</sup> Martha Carlin, 'Fast Food and Urban Living Standards in Medieval England', in Martha Carlin and Joel T. Rosenthal eds., *Food and Eating in Medieval Europe* (London, 1998), p. 47.

<sup>122</sup> See Chapter Four, p. 144.

<sup>123</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 44v.

his wife to look after the almsmen.<sup>124</sup> Perhaps the reason for mixed sex almshouses was practical; women were apparently regarded as useful presences in the almshouse in order to do the domestic work. The presence of a spouse may also have helped people to adjust to the dramatic change from communal to solitary living.

Because married couples were allowed to share an almshouse, some almspeople had a measure of company (at least until one of them died). Nevertheless, it is hard to establish an individual almsperson's exact experience of privacy to pray and study in the almshouse. Almshouses were very varied. However, an analysis of the use of space in the almshouse can provide a window into attitudes towards these issues. The experience of privacy in almshouses certainly diverged from the communal traditional medieval hospitals, where patients slept in the nave of the Church in sight of the Host on the altar. Instead, the residents of almshouses lived in small private apartments, often two rooms, one bedroom and one living or study room, sometimes a single room. The provision of individual living accommodation was universal across almshouses, whether this involved the installation of partitions, as at Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse (1502) at the Westminster Almonry, or the construction of purpose-built little houses as at Milbourne's Almshouse (1534).<sup>125</sup> The spatial markers of privacy within the almshouse are also aptly illustrated by the provision and use of gates, keys, lavatories and heating.

One of the clearest indicators that residents of almshouses enjoyed privacy from the rest of the local community is the provision of gates and the means to control access into and out of the almshouse. Gates were most prominent on almshouses that were secluded by being built in back alleys (which had the added benefit of being cheaper to buy), including, for example, Barton's Alley and Smith's Almshouse; those within Company Hall precincts, such as the Grocers', Brewers' and Cutlers'; and those behind grand houses like Cook's and Gresham's almshouses.<sup>126</sup> The gates to these institutions were often elaborate and included mottos, names and coats-of-arms. These gates

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<sup>124</sup> *Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. James Gairdner, (London, 1876), pp. i-xli.

<sup>125</sup> Stow, *Survey*, pp. 140, 393-4; Neil Rushton, 'Spatial Aspects of the Almonry Site and the Changing Priorities of Poor Relief at Westminster Abbey c.1290-1540', *Architectural History*, 45 (2002), p. 85.

<sup>126</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 301, 295, 306, 292, 294, 319, 318.

were important. Barton's Almshouse gate was rebuilt and repaired on several occasions in the fifteenth century, and gates remain important to almspeople today. On a recent visit the head almsman at Brown's Almshouse in Stamford was proud to show me the original fifteenth-century key to the gate into the almshouse premises. These gates were not just physical barriers, they were also symbolic.<sup>127</sup> Several of the richer almshouses, Whittington's, Henry VII's and St Katharine's, sought to control the amount of time residents could be away from the almshouse. Often an almsman was appointed to look after the gate and given a higher pension in recompense, as discussed below.<sup>128</sup> In many ways, these restrictions were not as onerous as those on professed monks and nuns who were cloistered and restricted by vows, but they sought to ensure that residents were dedicated to the communities they lived in and participated in the daily round of prayer and praise rather than sneaking off to other places.<sup>129</sup>

Keys were also a prime indicator of a provision for privacy, and they are mentioned in several almshouse records; for example, the Cutlers' and Brewers' almshouses had new keys cut for the use of individual almspeople. In both cases the rooms were in the gate house to the Company Hall. A busy place filled with people coming and going. In this environment perhaps the doors to the residences themselves were the symbolic passage between the busy community outside and the liminal space inside. The presence of the almspeople themselves could confer on the Company Hall a sense of liminality, a connection between this world and the world of the dead.<sup>130</sup> Keys are important because they indicate that residents were able both to lock other people out of their residences and lock themselves in and this gave almspeople some control of their own privacy. This implies the acceptance and encouragement of both privacy and solitude if the resident so wished it. The possession of keys also indicates that the almspeople were viewed with a measure of respect. The Brewers' almshouse was sited within the Brewers' Hall compound and almspeople were trusted with a key. William

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<sup>127</sup> GA MS30727/1: Skinners' Receipts and Payments book 1491.

<sup>128</sup> See section 6.3 below.

<sup>129</sup> See Chapter Seven, p. 251, for more information about the role of gates in the almshouse.

<sup>130</sup> See Chapter Seven, pp. 257-8, for more information about connection with the dead.

Porlond, clerk to the Brewers' Company recorded repairs for: '... a lock to the privy door of the almshouse 4d...' <sup>131</sup>

Given the range of meanings associated with the word 'privy' in the fifteenth century this might be a key to a private door to the almshouse within the Brewers' Hall, or to the almshouse latrine. <sup>132</sup>

The provision of a hearth and a latrine were also structural evidence that almspeople were to spend time in privacy. They did not need to wander from their study or their prayers to find warmth or to relieve themselves. There were various terms used to describe latrines in references to almshouses in late-medieval and Tudor London and Westminster. The Skinners' accounts relating to Henry Barton's Almshouse refer to the almshouse 'seate', whereas the ordinances for Whittington's Almshouse refer to 'Pryveyes' as do the ordinances of Henry VII's Almshouse. <sup>133</sup>

Whittington's Almshouse (1424) made provision for each almsman (or almsman and wife):

Also we woll and ordeyn that every persone of hem now Tutor and pouer folk and successours have a place by him self with in the seid Almeshous That is to sey a Celle or a litell house with a chymene and a pryvey and other necessities in whiche he shalle lyegge and rest And that he may a loon and by hym slefe with owte lette of eny other person intende to the contemplacion of God if he woll <sup>134</sup>

This passage shows the close link between the provision of luxuries, such as a latrine for personal use and a hearth to provide warmth, and the contemplation of God. The poor person was to have their basic needs met (warmth and elimination) so that nothing may interfere with their private study of the divine. This was also a prime objective influencing the architecture of Henry VII's almshouse in 1500 and it is also evident in the Countess of Kent's Almshouse in 1538 (see figure 6.2 Ralph Treswell's

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<sup>131</sup> Metcalfe, 'William Porlond', p. 74.

<sup>132</sup> OED.

<sup>133</sup> 'Item for the clensyng of the seate belonging to the almes howses conteynyng 15 tonns', Skinners' Receipts and Payments book 1501 and 1506, GA MS 30727/1; Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 111; Fox, 'The Royal Almshouse at Westminster', p. 84; WAM, 18140.

<sup>134</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 112.

1612 plan of the Countess of Kent's Almshouse below) and Emmanuel Hospital (Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse) in 1595.<sup>135</sup>

The original plan of the Countess of Kent's Almshouse in Whitefriars differed from the 1612 plan by Ralph Treswell in that originally there were seven almshouses with a garden and two small tenements inhabited by a porter and another tenant. The almshouses were built on the site of the Friary's Scholar's garden (called the Coke) and each comprised a single room with a hearth and chimney, and a privy. The residents were allowed full access to the garden and to the water supply which were accessed via a gate.<sup>136</sup> It is apparent from the Ralph Treswell plan that by 1612 the almshouses had been reduced to five, the tenements for the porter and another tenant had been subsumed into another building complex and the garden seems to have disappeared. However, the hearths, privies and gate remained for the comfort of the almswomen.

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<sup>135</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 300, 293, 297.

<sup>136</sup> J. Schofield, ed., *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell* (London, 1987), pp. 129-30.

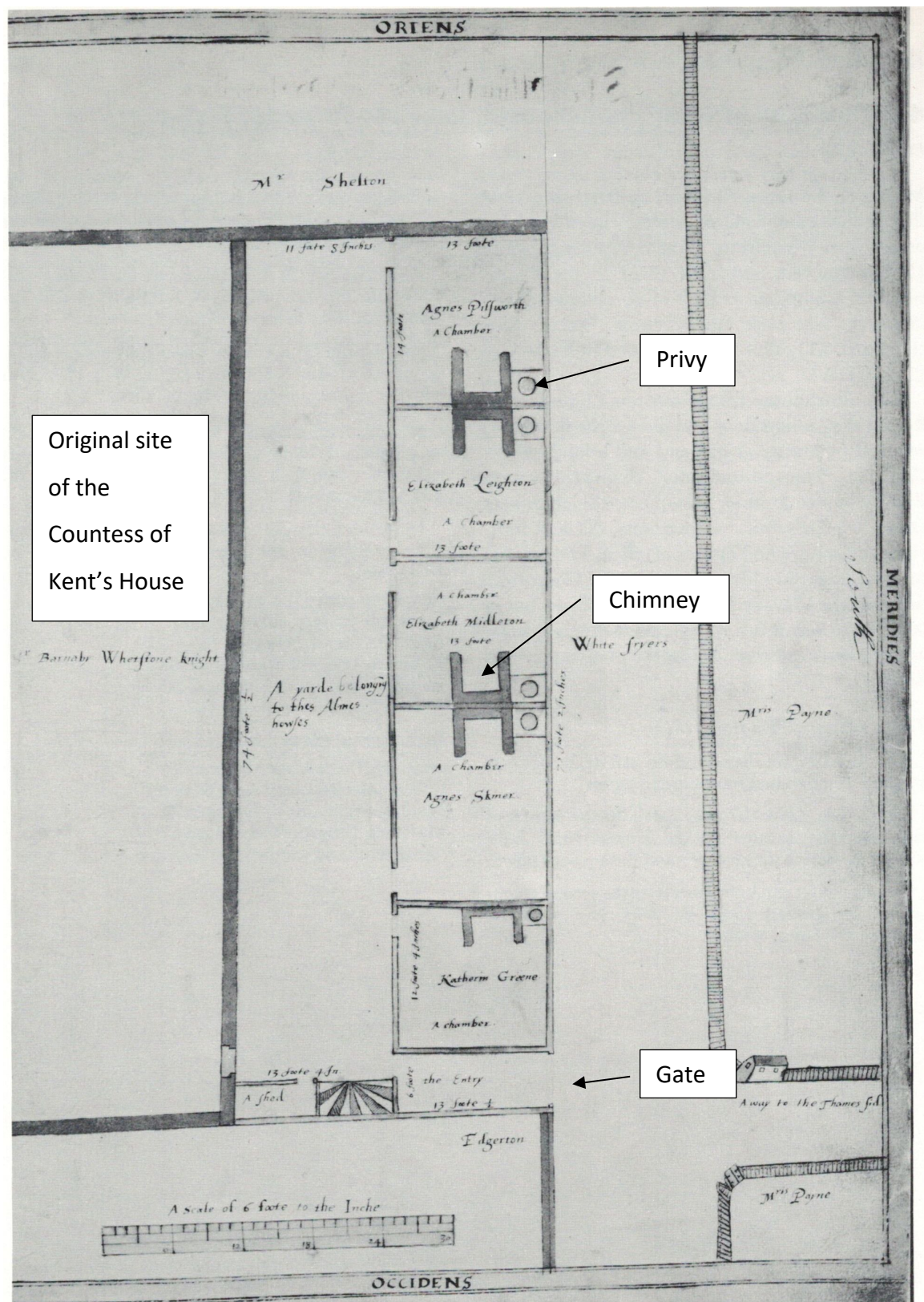


Figure 6.2: The Countess of Kent's Almshouse at Whitefriars by Ralph Treswell, 1612 <sup>137</sup>

<sup>137</sup> Schofield, *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell*, p. 130.

Even poorer almshouses often provided private privies for almshouse residents. The Brewer's Company Accounts of 1423 record a payment of two pence for 'amendyng of an lok to þe dore of þe privie yn an Chamber of þe seide Almesse hous', and one pence 'for j Erthen potte, for to keep þe water yn of þe privie yn an Chamber of þe seide Allmesse hous'.<sup>138</sup>

Frank Rexroth suggested a different explanation for the provision of keys, fireplaces, and privies in the fifteenth-century almshouses of London. He agreed that these were symbols of privacy but rather than enabling the residents to spend more time in the contemplation of God he saw these features as a vehicle for privacy to protect them from the shame of their poverty.<sup>139</sup> Rexroth used the example of Richard Whittington's provision of hearths and privies in his bequest for the rebuilding of Newgate Prison as evidence for this theory. He noted that prisoners were also allowed to leave their cells to pray. Most of the inmates of these prison rooms were debtors (other offences were punished in more immediate ways), who tended to come from a wealthier background to make it worth imprisoning them until their debt was paid. Rexroth suggested that this provision was to protect the citizens from the shame of their debt, just as almshouses were protection from the shame of poverty. Rexroth typifies this shame of debt and shame of poverty as a feature of citizens of London rather than beggars and prostitutes.<sup>140</sup> However, I think this misinterprets the intention of the founders. Surely shame would be more associated with punishment as represented by a traditional debtor's prison including a cold stone room and a bucket in the corner than warmth and a lavatory *en suite*, provided by Richard Whittington at Newgate Prison. Visiting prisoners (sometimes phrased as redeeming the captive), comforting the afflicted and forgiving sins are corporal and spiritual works of mercy. Perhaps Whittington reasoned that prisoners who were comfortably housed during their incarceration were more likely to contemplate their sins and pray for the soul of their benefactor.

The provision of both hearths and privies in almshouses (and Newgate Prison), reflected the provision of individual cells for the Carthusian monks, such as at Cobham

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<sup>138</sup> Chambers and Daunt, *A Book of London English*, p. 155.

<sup>139</sup> Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, pp. 252-255.

<sup>140</sup> Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 263.



in Kent and probably Charterhouse in London (a subject I will return to in Chapter Seven).<sup>141</sup> They are an indication that the inspiration for the design of the cells both for prisoners and almsfolk was monastic, they were for prayer, study and contemplation, rather than the concealment of embarrassment and shame.

Another piece of evidence that casts doubt on Rexroth's theory is that even poorer almshouses tried to provide as many comforts for their poor residents as they could. David Smith's (Embroiderers') Almshouse (1587) (see figure 6.3 Ralph Treswell's 1611 plan of David Smith's Almshouse below), provided a hearth, with a chimney and privy for his almswomen. These chimneys and privies were in the original foundation and they were still maintained when Ralph Treswell drew up plans of the property nearly twenty-five years later. These almswomen were to be six poor widows aged at least fifty-six who had been resident in the parish for at least twenty years; no blasphemers were allowed, and they must be people who lived a godly life. The widows were required to leave the almshouse if they re-married. Again and again the founders stress that the residents should be 'godly' or 'honest': the emphasis of the founders was on their virtue, not their shame.

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<sup>141</sup> Coppack and Aston, *Christ's Poor Men*, p. 77.



The provision of hearths enabled residents to be private in their accommodation, obviating the need for them to seek warmth in communal areas. Monasteries provided warming rooms for monks to repair to when they could no longer stand the winter cold. The Merchant Adventurers' Hospital in York provided charcoal braziers, which were a common form of heating, but these were placed in communal rather than private areas.<sup>143</sup> However, chimneys in private rooms appear to have been in use from the fourteenth century in London. John Schofield suggested that the adoption of chimneys and wall fireplaces was spurred on by pressures on space, and the adoption of chimneys themselves encouraged the division of larger halls into smaller spaces.<sup>144</sup>

The needs of those embarking upon a pilgrimage of the soul - a guide for the spiritual path, the peace, space, and time to study and pray and protection from the distraction of physical bodily needs - were all provided by almshouses. Even poor, less well-endowed almshouses sought to provide as many of these facilities as possible. The provision of luxuries, such as books, and privacy in terms of private rooms, chimneys, privies, keys and gates implies a measure of respect and honour for the almshouse residents and the desire both for their effective prayers as righteous people, and for them to have the peace, space, time and resources they needed to prepare their own souls for death.

### 6.3 Autonomy and Dependence in the Almshouse

Taking a pilgrimage of the soul involved a measure of autonomy or self-determination.<sup>145</sup> To become a pilgrim, both in the late-Middle Ages and now, an individual had to make a concrete decision to do so. Likewise, joining an almshouse and embarking on an internal pilgrimage also involved an element of choice. Even if circumstances outside the almshouse were difficult, residents were not compelled to join the almshouse; they had to be offered a place and then choose to join. Also, the structural and organisational emphasis on privacy within the almshouse indicates that almspeople had a measure of control over their lives. They appear to have been treated with respect, even honour. However, almspeople were also poor and

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<sup>142</sup> Schofield, *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell*, p. 108.

<sup>143</sup> Giles, *An Archaeology of Social Identity*, p. 29.

<sup>144</sup> Schofield, *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell*, p. 17.

<sup>145</sup> 'Pilgrimage', *OED*.

dependent on the almshouse for their survival. This tension between autonomy and dependence is evident in the decision to enter an almshouse, in the names used to describe the almspeople, in the day-to-day management of almshouse communities, in the behaviour of almspeople, in the pensions and income they were able to access and in the charitable agency of their lives in the almshouse.

The approach of impotence, defined in the late-Middle Ages as want of strength or power, utter inability or weakness and feebleness of body due to illness or old age, was a time of apprehension and anxiety.<sup>146</sup> For those who were wealthy enough there were options: it was possible to buy a corrody which enabled the individual to live with support and pension from a hospital or monastery in return for money and lands.<sup>147</sup> Other options for the well-to-do included making legal agreements with children for help and support until death.<sup>148</sup> Some took holy orders and entered a monastery, sometimes with the payment of a corrody, but again this was only really an option for those who were wealthy enough to afford it. Widows in London were less likely to be in need than in other cities, at least wealthy widows. London offered wealthy widows the opportunity for independence. Even widows who were not wealthy had some protection in London. It was the custom in London that widows were allowed to stay in the marital home until their deaths or remarriage, if the house belonged to the husband by freehold or leasehold. They were also able to continue their husbands' business and take on apprentices or initiate a business on their own.<sup>149</sup> Anne Sutton also records that widowed mothers in London were often cared for in or near the houses of their successful children.<sup>150</sup> The status of widows was quite different in other European cities. In Florence, for example, widows were particularly severely affected following the Black Death of 1348 and many were deprived of their inheritance, as they had no legitimate legal presence and could not appear in court to defend themselves. This made them particularly vulnerable to becoming victims of

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<sup>146</sup> OED.

<sup>147</sup> Cullum, *Cremmetts and Corrodies*, p. 21.

<sup>148</sup> R. M. Smith, 'The Manorial Court and the Elderly Tenant in Late Medieval England', in Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith eds., *Life and Death and the Elderly, Historical Perspectives* (London and New York, 1991), p. 48.

<sup>149</sup> Barron, 'Introduction: The Widow's World', p. iii; Barron 'The "Golden Age" of Women in Medieval London', pp. 35-58.

<sup>150</sup> Anne Sutton, *Wives and Widows of Medieval London* (Donnington, 2016), p. 3.

men who professed help and then defrauded them. Women were also excluded from inheriting the paternal estate, and poverty made them less appealing to possible suitors.<sup>151</sup>

Even paupers had some degree of control over their survival in old age, at least at the beginning of the era. Claire Schen found that before the sixteenth century, elderly and impotent pauper women survived by utilising networks of family, kinship and neighbourhood to access employment, charity and poor relief.<sup>152</sup> Parish almshouses, if available, might be one of several tactics used to ensure survival. Margaret Pelling identified a number of strategies used by the impotent and elderly poor to survive in the later sixteenth century.<sup>153</sup> These included marriage (often to a younger spouse) and working at occupations, such as brewing, knitting, spinning and carding, or childcare (for women). Men might take less skilled work within their own craft (if appropriate) or labouring jobs that were suited to their abilities (sweeping, caretaking, portering, etc.). Margaret Pelling also found that elderly poor people in sixteenth-century Norwich rarely lived with married children, but they were likely to live in households with other people, such as elderly widows, single daughters, grandchildren or in the houses of other families to provide assistance with childcare or household duties.<sup>154</sup> A very few lucky individuals might find a place at an almshouse. By 1600, when the population of London reached approximately 200,000, there were only around 240 beds available in almshouses in the City of London and sixty in Westminster.<sup>155</sup> So for many elderly people in London, even the poor, there were some options in addition to almshouses.

Almshouses provided considerable benefits, but they also came with potentially onerous responsibilities and restrictions. They provided an ideal sanctuary for those of a quiet and pious disposition, who wanted to spend their declining years concentrating

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<sup>151</sup> Henderson, *Piety and Charity*, p. 307.

<sup>152</sup> Claire Schen, 'Strategies of poor aged women and widows in 16th Century London', in Lynn Botelho and Pat Thane eds., *Women and Ageing in British Society Since 1500* (Harlow, 2001), p. 13.

<sup>153</sup> Margaret Pelling, 'Old Age, Poverty and Disability in Norwich', in Margaret Pelling and Richard M. Smith eds., *Life, Death, and the Elderly*, (London, 1991), pp. 82-83.

<sup>154</sup> Pelling, 'Old Age, Poverty and Disability in Norwich', pp. 85-86.

<sup>155</sup> Harding, 'The Population of London, 1550-1700', pp. 111-128; Keene, 'A New Study of London before the Fire', p. 20; Barron, *London in the Later Middle Ages*, p. 238.

on spiritual pilgrimage and charity. These qualities and the respect they engendered are evident in the words used to refer to almshouse residents.

One way of assessing the perceived status and autonomy of almspeople is to look at the titles they were given when they entered the almshouse. There is a considerable variation in names used to describe almspeople at the time. This is best demonstrated by the Countess of Kent's Almshouse, where her will described the residents of Whittington's Almshouse as 'almsmen', the women in her own almshouse as 'poor women' and 'bedes women', while the indentures made out between the Countess of Kent and the Clothworkers' Company in 1538, two years before her death in 1540, referred to the residents of the almshouse as 'Alms women'.<sup>156</sup> The ordinances of Whittington's Almshouse (1444 - twenty years after the foundation of the institution), referred to the residents variously as 'pouer people', 'poure folk' and 'poure man'.<sup>157</sup> Other terms in common usage across the time of this study include almsfolk, alms man, poor widow, wretched people, honest and poor aged man or woman, and brothers. The term 'brothers' was used exclusively in wills relating to bequests to the two fraternities which ran St Augustine Papey, an almshouse for poor aged priests, and the Parish Clerks' Almshouse.<sup>158</sup>

As we saw in Chapter One, the early use of the term 'almswoman' or 'almsman' could be ambiguous, being used to refer to both those in receipt of alms and those giving alms.<sup>159</sup> The use of the term 'poor folk' is less ambiguous. Some founders talk consistently about the residents of the almshouse using elaborate forms of words. For example, the ordinances of Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse (Emmanuel Hospital 1595) continually refer to residents as 'Poor, honest and aged man', or 'Poor honest and aged woman'. The frequent repetition of these phrases throughout the document underlines their importance. The 'Poor honest and aged man' or 'woman' takes on iconic status. They were the 'righteous people' whose fervent prayer 'availeth much', from the book of James in the New Testament, or the 'poor widow' in the Bible, and

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<sup>156</sup> CCA, Estate Records, CL/Estate/5/1A/5, Indenture between the Clothworkers' Company and Margaret, Countess of Kent, 14 July 1538.

<sup>157</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, Appendix 1, p. 321.

<sup>158</sup> Will of John Cokker, 5 September 1514, and Sir William Broke 1515, Darlington, *London Consistory Court Wills*, pp. 6, 14.

<sup>159</sup> See Chapter One p. 11.

this association lends the title honour and status.<sup>160</sup> The New Testament in particular, emphasised the importance of charity to poor widows and orphans and both these groups were explicitly catered for at Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse.

Despite this variation with regards to an almsperson's title, and the representation of almspeople as a generalised ideal there are a surprising number of references to individual almspeople by name from the fifteenth century onwards. Individuals in receipt of alms were named in company accounts from the fourteenth century. Almspeople living in almshouses were mostly unidentified, but when they lived with the founder, were occasionally individually named in their wills. For example, in 1578 Sir Ambrose Nicholas' will named each of the almspeople resident in his almshouse (where Sir Ambrose Nicholas also lived) and left them gowns and other benefits, along with arranging for the Salters' Company to continue to look after the almshouse. The residents were: Alys Windforde widowe, Edmund Naylor, Robert Pamphrey, John Scotney, (unreadable – possibly Alice) Kinyeson widowe, Richard Warren, Katheryne Stindley widowe, Elizabeth Sorbyo widowe, John Powell, (unreadable), John Mouuys, (unreadable) Harding and (blank) Hatton'.<sup>161</sup> The naming of almspeople in wills is indicative of strong, perhaps tender, feelings of the founder towards them.

Because of almspeople's intrinsic righteousness, their piety and good name they commanded a level of respect both from the founders and the administrative managers of almshouses. This respect translated into a surprising degree of autonomy over the day-to-day management of their almshouses.

Several early almshouse founders clearly had a positive attitude regarding the trustworthiness and responsibility of their potential residents. All members of St Katharine's Hospital, including the poor bedeswomen, had an equal vote in matters pertaining to the management of the hospital.<sup>162</sup> At Richard Whittington's Almshouse the Tutor (head of the almshouse) was appointed from among the residents. This post came with administrative power, which could be abused. In 1538 the almsmen at Whittington's Almshouse became so fed up with their Tutor continually talking about

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<sup>160</sup> 'The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much'. James 5. 16 KJV.

<sup>161</sup> Sir Ambrose Nicholas' Will, Salters' Company, 28 April 1578.

<sup>162</sup> Ducarel, *History of St Katharine's*, p. 68.



his support for the Pilgrimage of Grace that they were ready to leave.<sup>163</sup> In other almshouses, such as St Stephen's Westminster and Milbourne's Almshouse, one of the almsfolk received a higher pension for taking on the duty of gatekeeper, which presumably gave the almsman greater responsibility and power within the almshouse. Other almshouses outside of London, such as that at Ewelme, also appointed the leader of the almshouse from among the residents. The majority of almshouses in London and Westminster depended on the managerial skills of the Livery Companies for their administration, but the day-to-day management of the almshouse appears to have been left to the residents themselves. Few wardens or overseers were appointed to live in the almshouses during this period. The almsfolk were not entirely left to their own devices, however: they were directly accountable to the administering body which had overall responsibility for the wellbeing of the institution. Therefore, if any of the almspeople misbehaved and it was reported to the governing body, they could, theoretically, be removed from the almshouse.

Residents of an almshouse were expected to conform to high standards of behaviour and a lifestyle that was monastic in many ways. This demanded a level of self-control from residents. The degree to which almspeople conformed or rebelled against these standards, even to the point of risking expulsion from the almshouse, can tell us much about their own perceptions of autonomy within the institution.

What could get a person expelled from the almshouse? The surviving indentures and ordinances are clear about what sort of behaviour was unacceptable. However, there are very few of these remaining. Most of these rules on behaviour involve property, speech, and conduct. Carole Rawcliffe suggested that the founders of *leprosaria* and almshouses were anxious to prevent any taint or sin in their foundations that risked 'upsetting the rounds of intercessory prayer, or, even worse, of contaminating a sacred space with the miasmas of sin'.<sup>164</sup> Many almshouses were referred to in their founder's will, but the wills are surprisingly quiet about the types of behaviour that would cause an almsperson to be expelled. As we have seen above, instead they tend

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<sup>163</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 50.

<sup>164</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', p. 14.



to concentrate on the positive attributes that would characterise an ideal almsperson, such as poverty, piety, honesty, and goodness.

In 1538 the Countess of Kent set out the specification for the widows appointed to her almshouses:

....[If] a wife of a Clothworker at the time of the vacancy wants the room, if she is of good conversation and learned then she is to be admitted before anyone else and if there is no such woman then some other such poor woman shall be admitted, provided she is at least 50 years old and honest, virtuous and of good name and not detected of any open crime.<sup>165</sup>

Many of the qualifications for a place in the almshouses were concerned with public reputation, rather than private spirituality or character.<sup>166</sup> The same was broadly true for the types of behaviour that would result in an almsperson being expelled from the almshouse. Whittington's Almshouse ordinances state that none of the almsfolk were to be outside the house at night and that:

...noon of the seid pouer folk be custumably drunkelewe glotenouse or brigouse amonges his felawes haunting Tavernes or be unchast of his bodie walking or gasing in the Streetes of the seid Citee or Subarbes there of by day or be nyght without a reasonable cause to be discussed and weied by the discrecion and Jugement of the seid Tutor ...<sup>167</sup>

If almsfolk were accused of these types of behaviour, they were to be punished by the withdrawal of pension payments. Any almsperson found guilty of a third infringement was to be put out of the house, but they could appeal to the administering body. The pattern of three warnings before dismissal is familiar across many types of almshouse in this era. Other reasons for leaving the almshouse could be to do with a change in circumstance by inheritance or marriage. At Whittington's Almshouse an increase in personal means of over five marks a year meant that the individual had to leave the almshouse; if less, then half of the inheritance went into the common chest and the individual could enjoy the other half.

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<sup>165</sup> CCA, Estate Records, CL/Estate/5/1A/5, Indenture between the Clothworkers' Company and Margaret, Countess of Kent, 14 July 1538.

<sup>166</sup> Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 241.

<sup>167</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 119.

Jean Imray recorded two sixteenth-century Tutors at Whittington's Almshouse who were the subject of complaints by the almsmen for their care of the common chest.<sup>168</sup> However, of the 500 people admitted to the almshouse between 1511 and 1821, only twenty-three were expelled (less than 5 per cent of almspeople). Five expulsions at Whittington's Almshouse were associated with the maladministration of Tutor Thomas Poplewell between 1577 and 1579, and William Andrews, joiner, was expelled in 1585, when it was found he had a wife still living (though wives were allowed in the almshouse so it appears to be the dishonesty that was the problem); and George Harrison, Clothworker, was expelled in 1588 for 'cozening under colour of conjuring'.<sup>169</sup> As we have seen, the Warden in Charge of St James' Westminster was censured in the fourteenth century, but there is very little archival evidence of bad behaviour on the part of almsfolk at these early almshouses in London and Westminster.<sup>170</sup> Some expulsions involved almspeople being involved in subletting their accommodation for substantial financial gain. The almswomen at St James' Westminster were censured for subletting their accommodation, which was very close to the palace of Westminster, but not expelled; and following the Dissolution, John Stow was scathing about the allocation of spaces to almsfolk at the Parish Clerks' Almshouse, which he said went to 'such as can make best friends', who take the pension and then sublet the almshouses.<sup>171</sup>

Neither of these episodes of subletting appears to have resulted in the expulsion of the perpetrators. Only two women are recorded as being expelled from the Countess of Kent's Almshouse in the sixteenth century. In 1565, Widow James was named as the replacement for an almswoman who 'had been diverse times complained on for misrule' and 'shall be expulsd'.<sup>172</sup> Similarly, in 1577, the Company evicted almswoman Mrs. Scott from Whitefriars for her 'leud behaviour' with James Graunt the almshouse gate porter.<sup>173</sup> Overall, almspeople seem to have been mostly well behaved and law-abiding. Perhaps the selection process was effective at recruiting

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<sup>168</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 66.

<sup>169</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 68.

<sup>170</sup> For more about the bad behaviour at St James' Almshouse, see Chapter Four, pp. 122-3.

<sup>171</sup> Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, p. 302; Stow, *Survey*, p. 158.

<sup>172</sup> CCA, Court Orders, CL/B/1/2, fol. 78v.

<sup>173</sup> CCA, Court Orders, CL/B/1/2, fol. 213r.

almsfolk who were more likely to live in charitable community with each other and not indulge in behaviour that might call the institution into disrepute. Certainly, later institutions like the early-modern Charterhouse had many more issues with bad behaviour from both their clergy and ex-servicemen almsmen.<sup>174</sup> Perhaps late-medieval almsfolk were generally happy and contented with their lives and relieved to be sheltered from the disputes and trials of the outside world. Perhaps this lack of bad behaviour is also an indication that almspeople were sensible of their good fortune at obtaining a place in an almshouse: they were dependent upon it and were unwilling to risk it by breaking the rules.

One rule all almshouses appeared to agree on is that residents should not own property and should be poor, albeit relative to the expectations of their social peers. The pensions given to almspeople also demonstrate a wide variation, from no pension at the earliest almshouses, such as Elsyngspital and St Katharine's (though St Katharine's also provided food, clothing and fuel), to 24d per week for the almsmen at Henry VIII's Almshouse at the Woolstaple.<sup>175</sup> The average pension given by almshouse foundations in London was around 8d a week. Some almshouse foundations paid more; Whittington's Almshouse gave 14d per week, the Taylors paid 13d per week and Martin Bowes' Almsman received 16d per week, as did the head almsman at the Parish Clerks' Almshouse. Both the Brewers' and the Cutlers' Almshouse gave individual almsfolk different pensions ranging from 2d per week to 10d per week.<sup>176</sup> The Goldsmiths' received a wide variation of pensions and in their turn they paid quarterage of 4d yearly to help with their funeral expenses.<sup>177</sup> There is nothing to indicate the reason for this variation. At the other end of the scale Thomas Cook proposed that his almsfolk should receive 1d per week which is obviously too little to keep an individual fed.<sup>178</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Stephen Porter, 'Order and Disorder in the Early Modern Almshouse: The Charterhouse example', *The London Journal*, 23 1 (1998), p. 12.

<sup>175</sup> Jordan, *Charities*, p. 140.

<sup>176</sup> Machi Sasai, 'Corporate Charity of London Cutlers' in the Fifteenth Century', *The Haskins Society Journal Japan*, 5 (2013), pp. 15-26; Metcalfe, 'William Porlond', p. 33.

<sup>177</sup> T. F. Reddaway and L. Walker, *Early History of the Goldsmiths' Company, 1327-1509: Including the Book of Ordinances, 1478-88* (London, 1975), p. 111.

<sup>178</sup> Sir Thomas Cook's will TNA, PROB 11/6/467 (36 Wattys).

Christopher Dyer estimated that a quarter of a penny a day was the absolute minimum a person could survive on in the late-Middle Ages. Dyer also found that 1 penny a day was the average alms given to poor company members and almsfolk which would be enough to buy bread, meat and a little ale.<sup>179</sup> A penny a day does indeed appear to be the average alms given to almsfolk to survive on in London. William Elsyng stated that the reason he did not provide a pension for people living in his almshouse was that residents had plenty of opportunity to beg a meal from other sources of charity within the City of London.<sup>180</sup> Pensions were not the only form of support given to almspeople. Many almspeople also benefitted from access to small gardens, which could be used to grow pot herbs to supplement their diet. Many almshouses also provided benefits in addition to the pension. These often included fuel or a payment in lieu of fuel, clothing, and food.

However, the almsfolk were not always completely dependent on the institution; there were ways to increase their income. Almspeople living at the Brewers' Almshouse earned extra income helping around the Company Hall, keeping chickens and assisting at feasts at Brewers' Hall for which they were paid.<sup>181</sup> Milbourne's Almshouse required that the almsmen should not sell ale or wine, which implies that he had experience of that during his lifetime and wanted to stop it happening again after his death.<sup>182</sup> Margaret Pelling recorded that there were very few people so incapacitated or feeble that they could not spin and earn themselves a few pence by their personal endeavour.<sup>183</sup>

Many of the almshouses, including Whittington's, Merchant Taylors', Brewers', and Cutlers' took possession of an almsperson's remaining possessions when they died. In 1475 when almswoman Johan died in the Cutlers' Almshouse, her daughter paid 20s to the Cutlers' Company for her mother's goods.<sup>184</sup> William Porlond's Minute book gives a remarkable insight into the possessions at death of several almspeople in the Brewers' Almshouse in the early fifteenth century. One almsman had many

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<sup>179</sup> Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Middle Ages*, p. 253.

<sup>180</sup> Bowtell, 'A Medieval London Hospital: Elsyngspital 1330-1536', pp. 49, 50.

<sup>181</sup> Metcalfe, 'William Porlond', pp. 32-36.

<sup>182</sup> Milbourn, 'The Milbourne Alms-Houses', pp. 139-152.

<sup>183</sup> Pelling, 'Old Age, Poverty and Disability in Norwich', pp. 82-83.

<sup>184</sup> LMA, CLC/L/CL/D/001/MS07146/022 – Cutlers' Company Warden Accounts.

possessions at his death, including gowns and coats, mattress covers, sheets and pillowcases along with candlesticks and a 'pissing bolle'. This almsman appears to have left 47s 1½d in store, plus a list of possessions some of which were described as 'ragged'. The other two inventories also included clothing and bedding to the value of 5s and 16s.<sup>185</sup> The almsmen at the Brewers' Almshouse were poor, but not destitute; some had family, like Johan from the Cutlers' Almshouse, who had access to ready cash. This indicates a small measure of independence, which may have given them some degree of income above the pension paid by the almshouse.

Pensions also gave almspeople autonomy in a small way, in terms of being able to decide how to spend the money. As discussed earlier, the almshouse also enabled residents to exercise agency in the provision of charity for the health of their souls before and after death. Residents often actively participated in religious activities, reciting, and singing psalms.<sup>186</sup> It also enabled residents to exercise self-reliance when they were sick or approaching death in that they cared for each other. Several of the early almshouses started with the founder living on site and the almspeople became more than idealised paragons of virtue. As we have seen, some almspeople were even remembered by name in the founder's will, which implies a degree of affection within the relationship. The almshouses of Lady Anne Dacre and Cornelius Van Dun took this one step further. Van Dun's Almshouse sought to shelter older widows, who could provide nursing services for the local community in times of need, and Lady Anne Dacre expected those almspeople who were able enough to foster an orphan, who was to be educated at the almshouse school.<sup>187</sup> Both these almshouses demonstrate a level of demand on the residents, but this also implies ability on the part of the almsfolk beyond the church door. They were considered capable of caring for orphans and of competence in nursing, therefore having some medical knowledge: both activities demand some level of cognitive ability and power.

Again, we encounter a nuanced and considered idea of old age and disability that allows for a wide variation of both provision and expectation; whilst acknowledging a

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<sup>185</sup> Metcalfe, 'William Porlond', p. 86.

<sup>186</sup> See Chapter Five, pp. 169-170.

<sup>187</sup> *Parochial Charities of Westminster*, p. 63; *Endowed Charities*, p. 275.

level of dependence, on God and the institution for shelter and sustenance, it also allows almspeople a breadth of agency within their institutions that was not necessarily available later. A different approach is evident as soon as 1611 when the founder of Charterhouse, Thomas Sutton, appointed a master and preacher to run the establishment (a large school and almshouse with eighty residents), on a day-to-day basis and a porter to mind the gate.<sup>188</sup>

Respect for almspeople was demonstrated in the use of names, the provision, or lack of provision, of day-to-day oversight, and the trust that founders and administrators had that their communities would be self-regulating and respectable, borne out by the low number of incidents of bad behaviour recorded by those institutions. The residents of almshouses appear to have been sensible of their good luck in getting a place in an almshouse and for the most part the founders appear to have treated them as individuals, rather than an amorphous ideal, capable of accepting responsibility and living in charitable community with each other.

## 6.4 Conclusion

During the medieval period hospitals served as places of pilgrimage and healing for rich and poor alike, a *locus sanctus* destination at the end of a physical journey. The suspicion and distrust of the indigent poor, which increased during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, made it harder for poor people to take pilgrimages to smaller less well-known shrines. Pilgrimage to hospitals like St Bartholomew's dwindled.

Almshouses enabled ordinary people, who had fallen on hard times, and had the temperament for such an activity, to take their own moral and spiritual internal pilgrimage and prepare for death in charity and dignity.

New residents of almshouses left the bustle of the tightly packed community outside the almshouse to enter a liminal place, but usually within the geographical bounds of their familiar community. They embarked upon a pilgrimage of the soul to a heavenly Jerusalem, which took place in an unfamiliar environment of privacy. The rigorous timetable of prayer and devotion enabled the almspeople to prepare for their own deaths, saying the *De Profundis*, the penitential psalm that was a key part of the ritual

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<sup>188</sup> Porter, 'Order and Disorder in the Early Modern Almshouse', pp. 1-14.

of death, on a daily basis. The need for solitude and privacy to pray and learn was built into the fabric of the almshouse. Almshouses provided a learning environment suitable for the social level of the residents. Many had libraries and were attached to or related to colleges or schools. The architecture of the almshouse enabled the residents to have privacy to pray and learn with their own study areas. Basic needs were often met, so that almspeople were not distracted from their vocation. Gates provided a physical embodiment of the separation from the outside world. Keys gave almspeople control over their own space and who came in and out of it. The provision of hearths with chimneys, and privies, meant that their bodily comfort and health was attended to and they could carry on praying and learning in comfort.

Living in an almshouse was a vastly different experience to living in the busy urban space of the City of London and Westminster. The location remained the same, but the tenor of daily life changed radically. Almspeople chose to enter the almshouse; they had to be temperamentally suited to life both apart and in community. The role of an almsperson was one that commanded a measure of respect, despite their poverty. This is shown in the words used by founders to describe the people who would be best suited to this life, godly and honest. The respect for the almspeople was also shown by the fact that many early almshouses were largely self-governing institutions. Wardens or masters were not common in London or Westminster in lay or company-founded almshouses, which made up the majority of institutions founded during this period.

Bad behaviour also appears to have been unusual within the almshouse. The selection criteria appear to have been mostly successful in assigning places to people who felt a vocation to be there. Almspeople also had a measure of control about the way they lived. Most almshouses gave their residents some form of pension and additional benefits, such as fuel, food, and clothing. Many had places for residents to grow food or herbs, on a small scale. Other almspeople took on small jobs or other activities to raise money to support themselves within the almshouse. Almshouse residents brought some of their own things into the almshouses. When they died their belongings became the property of the almshouse, but up until death they were able to keep them to themselves. Almshouses also gave residents the freedom to exercise

charitable agency for the good of their own souls, their fellow residents, and people in the local community.

The position of almsperson was one that commanded a measure of respect, honour, and trust. They were no-longer subject to the gnawing anxiety of poverty; almspeople could embark on their final pilgrimage with their basic bodily needs met and focus their minds on spiritual development. Almshouses commanded a central physical presence in a community, close to the parish church or company hall they were central and visible. The next chapter examines the extent of the interaction of almshouses and almsfolk with the local community, their role in civic ceremony and the implications of their presence.



## Chapter Seven: Almshouses in the Community

‘Every day their wither’d hands held up  
Toward heaven,’<sup>1</sup>

In the last chapter we examined the experience of living in an almshouse, charting the residents’ withdrawal to the liminal space of the almshouse to embark on a spiritual pilgrimage in preparation for death. In contrast, this chapter seeks to analyse how almshouses interacted with their local communities, in order to place them in their appropriate positions within the urban community and examine their range and influence, and that of their residents.

The definition of community is multi-layered and can be subdivided into themes. Community can be defined as a group surrounded by a physical topographical boundary, a nation, state, or a body of people who live in the same place. Other definitions include aspects of governance, for example ‘a civic body to which all belong...’.<sup>2</sup> Aspects of culture are also important: so, for example, community can be defined as ‘A body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity’.<sup>3</sup> Also, groups who live or work together in a rule-bound group can be defined as a community. These definitions of community have qualities in common, which include identity, unity, social intercourse, and fellowship. They include relationships with neighbours: those who live near each other or share a parish, and family and friends. In the late-medieval and Tudor period these layers of community were complicated by an active relationship with the community of the dead. All these communities were knitted together by faith, piety, loyalty, patronage, social standing, reputation, occupation, wealth, ceremony, social events, social expectations, and membership of organisations, and each community was experienced individually.

Because of the multiple meanings for the word ‘community’, and a tendency to romanticise the communities of the past, Christine Carpenter has suggested the use of the word should be banned from all academic writing, although even Carpenter herself

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<sup>1</sup> W. Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London* 2 (London, 1838), p. 216. Herbert is misquoting Shakespeare, Henry V Act 4 Scene 1.

<sup>2</sup> OED

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

could not seem to shake free from the need to use the term.<sup>4</sup> The historical study of community was inspired initially by the work of anthropologists and sociologists, who suggested that community was a primitive pre-industrial form of social structure, which then developed into complex societies.<sup>5</sup> These early communities were assumed to be face-to-face and with clearly defined social and spatial borders.<sup>6</sup> Since then concepts of community have been refined. Ideas developed about 'communities of the mind' and communities that transcended neighbourhood.<sup>7</sup> More recently historians have been exploring the tendency of people in cities, even smaller medieval cities, to seek to be identified with smaller groups, such as parishes and neighbourhoods.<sup>8</sup> The urban community of the City of London and Westminster was complex. Residents of the City were often members of many communities, including craft, family, friends, fraternity, neighbours, parish, and ward. Archer has suggested that people living in the late-medieval city developed multiple identities based on their inclusion or exclusion from these groups.<sup>9</sup> Steve Rappaport emphasised the small scale of all these communities, which meant that people knew each other and developed strong bonds to both the organisations and the people within them.<sup>10</sup>

In order to gain a perspective on the role of almshouses and their residents in the various layers of community within the City of London and Westminster, it is necessary to analyse the interaction of almshouses from various angles. I will start with an analysis of the place of almshouses in the topography of the landscape and the implications this has for their role in communities associated with landscape and boundaries. The built form of the almshouses also impacted upon people in the local

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<sup>4</sup> Christine Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community in Medieval England', *Journal of British Studies* 33.4 (1994), p. 340.

<sup>5</sup> M. Rubin, 'Small Groups: Identity and Solidarity in the Late Middle Ages', in J. Kermode ed., *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England* (Stroud, 1991), pp. 132-35; A. Macfarlane, 'History, Anthropology and the Study of Communities', *Social History*, 5 (1977), pp. 631, 634-35; Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community', p. 343.

<sup>6</sup> S. Reynolds, *Kingdoms and Communities in Western Europe 900-1300*, (Oxford, 1997).

<sup>7</sup> A.P. Cohen, *Symbolic Construction of Community* (London, 1985), pp. 12-13; Alan Macfarlane, 'History, Anthropology and the Study of Communities', p. 633; Carpenter, 'Gentry and Community', p. 344.

<sup>8</sup> Rubin, 'Small Groups', p. 135; Charles Phythian-Adams, *Desolation of a City: Coventry and the Urban Crisis of the Later Middle Ages* (Cambridge, 1979), pp. 58-59. Rappaport, *Worlds within Worlds*, pp. 215-284.

<sup>9</sup> Ian W. Archer, 'The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London', *Cambridge Studies in Early Modern British History* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 61; Rubin, 'Small Groups', pp. 132-50.

<sup>10</sup> Rappaport, 'Structural Inequality', pp. 215-284.

community. The construction materials, form and design of almshouses, along with the permeability of the structures to access by local people, directly influenced the types of interactions that were possible with close physical neighbours and the local parish and the relationships that could be formed. The social structure and amenities provided by the almshouse also affected the residents' interaction with the local community. The role of almspeople in the religious and civic ceremonies of the city was also an important factor in the way almspeople were perceived by their neighbours and the civic elite and consequently the role they played in society.

## 7.1 Almshouses in the Landscape

One definition of community is 'a body of people who live in the same place, usually sharing a common cultural or ethnic identity'.<sup>11</sup> The term community can also refer to a nation or state. In this context the City of London can be said to constitute a community and likewise a parish; a smaller unit within the city, also comprises a community. The nature of these communities shaped (and in turn was shaped by) their topography. Writing on the interaction between topography and the people who occupy the spaces created by topography, Henri Lefebvre suggested that social space:

...serves as a tool of thought and of action... ...in addition to being a means of production it is also a means of control, and hence of domination, of power.<sup>12</sup>

Topography, in terms of the arrangement of artificial and natural features in a landscape, including aspects such as proximity to access points to the city, to markets, churches and the river, all shaped the communities of people who lived and worked in the space. Both Colson and Harding have argued that these factors along with social drivers, such as craft clustering (which was weakening during the fifteenth century), and access to wealthy customers or merchants, influenced people's choice of place of residence.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>11</sup> *OED*.

<sup>12</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991), p. 26.

<sup>13</sup> Justin Colson, 'Local Communities in Fifteenth Century London: Craft, Parish and Neighbourhood' (unpublished doctoral thesis, Royal Holloway, University of London, 2011); James L. Bolton, 'The Alien Population of London in the Fifteenth Century: A Reappraisal', *The Alien Communities of London in the Fifteenth Century: The Subsidy Rolls of 1440 and 1483-4* (Stamford, 1998), pp. 11-15; Harding, 'Houses and Households in Cheapside', pp. 135-54; Justin Colson, 'Commerce, Clusters, and Community: A Re-

The parish is often considered a prime unit of community within a larger pre-modern urban environment, not least due to the survival of some early parish records.

Charlotte Berry, however, is more persuaded that medieval and Tudor neighbourhoods and communities were defined by smaller units of space:

There may be multiple neighbourhoods within an administrative boundary like a parish; the street, the alley and even the arrangement of housing will also have played its part in shaping social relations.<sup>14</sup>

Gervase Rosser's work on Westminster and Martha Carlin's study of Southwark support this idea and have suggested that poor people tended to be found at the fringes of urban areas.<sup>15</sup> However, Berry has also suggested that the distribution of the poor and marginalised within the urban environment was more complex, and that within even ostensibly wealthy areas and behind prosperous commercial streets there were back streets and alleys which could provide refuge for the poor and marginalised.<sup>16</sup> The distribution of the poor and marginalised within large communities like the City of London and Westminster was subject to a complex range of factors. Harding found that the 'Public uses and private values [of property] complemented and reinforced one another'.<sup>17</sup> The value of property within an area was related to the status of its residents. Therefore, different parts of the city could have different social value which can be related to topographical features, such as markets, walls, gates, and architecture.

In this section I will investigate the local topography of almshouses and their built form, to determine what it can tell us about its role in contemporary society.

One of the most obvious differences between medieval hospitals and almshouses involved their topographical position. The older medieval hospitals and *leprosaria* appear to have been intentionally placed at the boundaries of towns, often close to

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Evaluation of the Occupational Geography of London, c. 1400 - c. 1550', *The Economic History Review*, 69 1 (2016), pp. 115-120.

<sup>14</sup> Berry, 'Margins and marginality', p. 32.

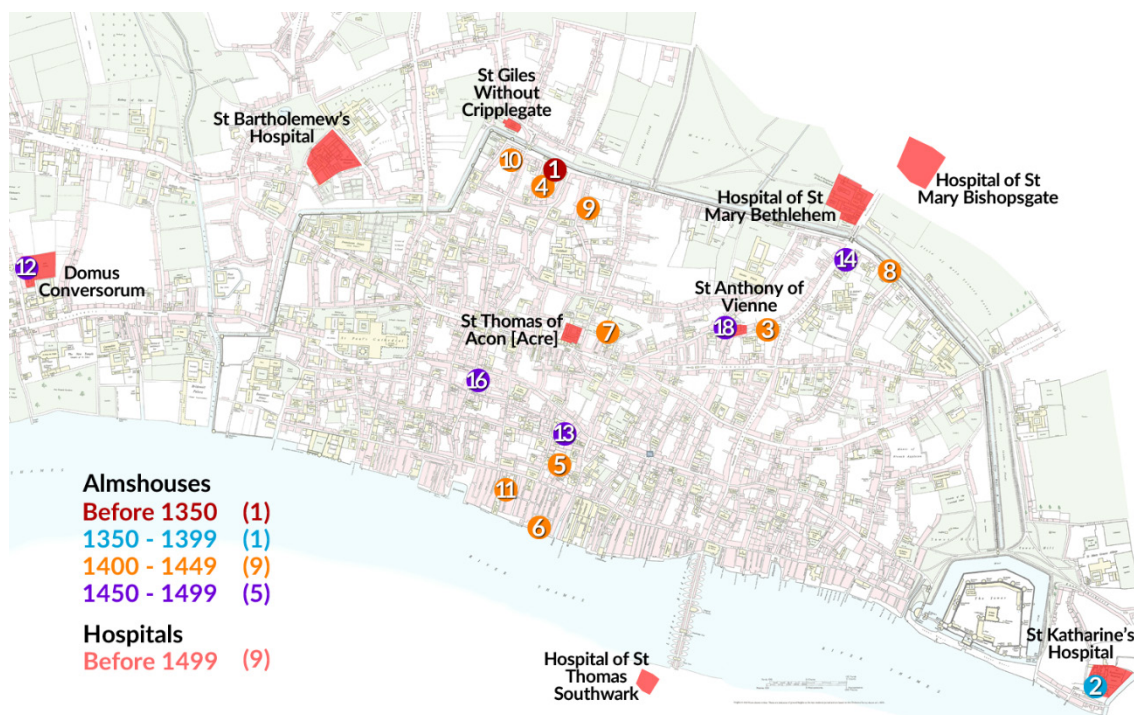
<sup>15</sup> Berry, 'Margins and marginality', p. 21; Martha Carlin, *Medieval Southwark* (London, 1996), pp. 181-84; Rosser, *Medieval Westminster*, pp. 217-25.

<sup>16</sup> Berry, 'Margins and marginality', p. 96.

<sup>17</sup> Vanessa Harding, 'Space, Property and Propriety in Urban England', *Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, 32 (2002), p. 562.

rivers.<sup>18</sup> The Book of Leviticus directed that lepers should 'dwell outside the camp', outside the city walls, and this was one of the factors directing the foundation of both *leprosaria* and hospitals on the outskirts of cities.<sup>19</sup> However, other considerations were also important. Carole Rawcliffe suggested that practical considerations were influential, including the need for copious amounts of fresh water and cheap land available for rapid expansion and domestic use. Hospitals were also placed near rivers and main roads and city gates convenient for begging for alms which constituted an important proportion of the hospital's income.<sup>20</sup> The position of hospitals and *leprosaria* also had symbolic significance. They could be seen as islands of charity in the marginal land outside the city, or as a spiritual bridge between heaven and earth.

Figure 7.1: Map of Medieval Hospitals and Almshouses of the City of London Founded Before 1499



The older medieval hospitals of the City of London and Westminster followed this pattern, with most being found at the edge or outside the city walls (see figure 7.1: Map of the medieval hospitals and almshouses of the City of London founded before

<sup>18</sup> Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p.107; Rawcliffe, *Medicine for the Soul*, pp. 35-38; R Gilchrist 'Christian Bodies and Souls: The Archaeology of Life and Death in Later Medieval Hospitals' in S Bassett ed., *Death in Towns: Urban Responses to the Dying and the Dead 100-1600* (Leicester, 1992), pp. 113-16.

<sup>19</sup> Leviticus 13. 46.

<sup>20</sup> Rawcliffe, 'The earthly and spiritual topography of suburban hospitals', p. 253.

1499, above). The exceptions to this were St Anthony of Vienne and St Thomas of Acon [Acre]. St Anthony of Vienne's Hospital was established by Henry III, before 1254, on the site of a synagogue. It was a small school and a hospital for twelve poor men and was rebuilt together with a new almshouse in 1499 due to the generosity of Sir John Tate.<sup>21</sup> It was closed down in 1565.<sup>22</sup> St Thomas of Acon [Acre] Hospital (1220/30) was the London house of the military order St Thomas of Acre.<sup>23</sup> The activities of this hospital are uncertain. It initially concerned itself with burying the dead and care of the poor, though there is little evidence of this.<sup>24</sup> I have been unable to find any evidence of its use as a hospital for the sick or an almshouse, though later commentators sometimes refer to it as such. Both these hospitals were small in comparison with the hospitals outside the walls.

The placement of almshouses was subject to a different set of requirements. Almshouses were frequently built within the city walls, close to a parish church or a company hall, or, increasingly, they were situated in a convenient or meaningful location for the founder. The development of new almshouses within the City of London, however, shows an interesting trend. At the beginning of the fifteenth century all nine new almshouses in the City of London were built within the walls of the city. These were based around Cripplegate, on the main road from Bishopsgate and around the company halls close to the River Thames to the south of the city. By the end of the fifteenth century, almshouses had begun to be built in areas outside the City walls in a wider variety of spaces, but still, usually, close to, or behind a main road.

This pattern was followed in other parts of England. Rawcliffe described the development of medieval hospitals and almshouses in Norwich where hospitals were initially founded on the boundary of the city (sometimes later overtaken by urban expansion), and almshouses were founded closer to the heart of the city.<sup>25</sup> Elaine Phillips's study of the charitable institutions of East Anglia also found this pattern.<sup>26</sup> In

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<sup>21</sup> M. Reddan, 'The Hospital of St. Anthony of Vienne', in Barron and Davies, *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, p. 228.

<sup>22</sup> Reddan, 'The Hospital of St. Anthony of Vienne', p. 231.

<sup>23</sup> A. J. Forey, 'The Military Order of St. Thomas of Acre', *English Historical Review*, 92 364 (1977) p. 485.

<sup>24</sup> Forey, 'The Military Order of St. Thomas of Acre', pp. 486, 501.

<sup>25</sup> Rawcliffe, 'The Earthly and Spiritual Topography of Suburban Hospitals', pp. 255.

<sup>26</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. viii.

Bruges, again, the pattern was very similar. The medieval hospitals of Bruges appear to have been founded inside the city walls, but again this may be due to the fast expansion of Bruges during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, meaning that hospitals founded on the outskirts of the town could quickly become suburban and then central. All the almshouses that developed in the fourteenth century in Bruges were within the city walls.<sup>27</sup> In Florence, however, the pattern was different. Hospitals were traditionally sited close to the centre of cities, though *leprosaria* were outside the city gates. The hospitals then expanded out from the centre of the city as the population grew. John Henderson suggested that this was due to the close association between hospitals and Churches and monasteries established in the centre of the city. The hospitals were:

‘designed by the communities of monks or canons to care for their own personnel, providing infirmaries and sanatoria for sick and elderly monks and nuns’.<sup>28</sup>

Then from the late-twelfth to the mid-thirteenth centuries pilgrim hospices began to be built on the main pilgrim routes into (and out of) Florence, just inside and outside the city gates. Henderson suggested this may have been due to the availability of land on the outskirts for large developments.<sup>29</sup> Smaller specialised hospitals were also built in suburban areas outside city walls at this time.<sup>30</sup>

The pattern of development of smaller specialised institutions, almshouses, in the centre of the city, seems to be a feature of northern European countries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. This characteristic was not shared by southern neighbours, but more work is required to ascertain whether this was a trend that extended beyond Bruges and Florence. In England and Northern Europe, the medieval hospitals were often founded by individuals, who could be lay (for example, St Bartholomew’s Hospital in London), or clerical (for example, St Giles’ Hospital in Norwich). These hospitals, unlike the early hospitals in Florence, tended to be separate

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<sup>27</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 197; Valentin Vermeersch, *Steden in Europa*, p. 196.

<sup>28</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 29.

<sup>29</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 19.

<sup>30</sup> Henderson, *The Renaissance Hospital*, p. 15.

from the monasteries or established churches. St Bartholomew's Hospital, for example was founded at the same time as the priory in 1133, but by the early thirteenth century they were separate establishments with distinct sites, funding and management.<sup>31</sup> The new almshouses were also frequently founded by lay people, but it seems revolutionary to build these institutions inside the city walls after centuries of founding them outside. If we accept Lefebvre's suggestion that social spaces are a tool of thought and action and also a means of control, domination and power, then the placement of the new almshouses at the heart of the city, away from their traditional environs, becomes deliberate and purposeful.<sup>32</sup> This was a dramatic change that signalled a move to take control and exercise power over these institutions by their founders, the civic elite, an idea which can be examined further by investigating the built form of almshouses and their position in the city.

The influence of almshouses on the local community (and vice-versa), was not limited to their topographical position in the city. Henri Lefebvre theorised that public space is physically shaped by the private spaces that surround it, and Vanessa Harding went further, suggesting that public space derived some of its character, both architectural and social, from the private spaces around it.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, the relationship between public and private space and the community that occupies those spaces is complex. This is especially true of almshouses, where the boundary between the private space of the almshouse and the public space of the urban street outside it was, to some extent, permeable. Lefebvre wrote that:

Visible boundaries such as walls or enclosures in general give rise for their part to an appearance of separation between spaces where in fact what exists is an ambiguous continuity.<sup>34</sup>

Helen Caffrey in her study of almshouse forms across the centuries found seven distinct building styles. The first identified was the 'Long Hall', described as a central space with beds down either side, with an integral chapel at one end. Other forms

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<sup>31</sup> M. Reddan, 'The Hospital of St Bartholomew, Smithfield', in Barron and Davies, *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, pp. 149-150.

<sup>32</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 26.

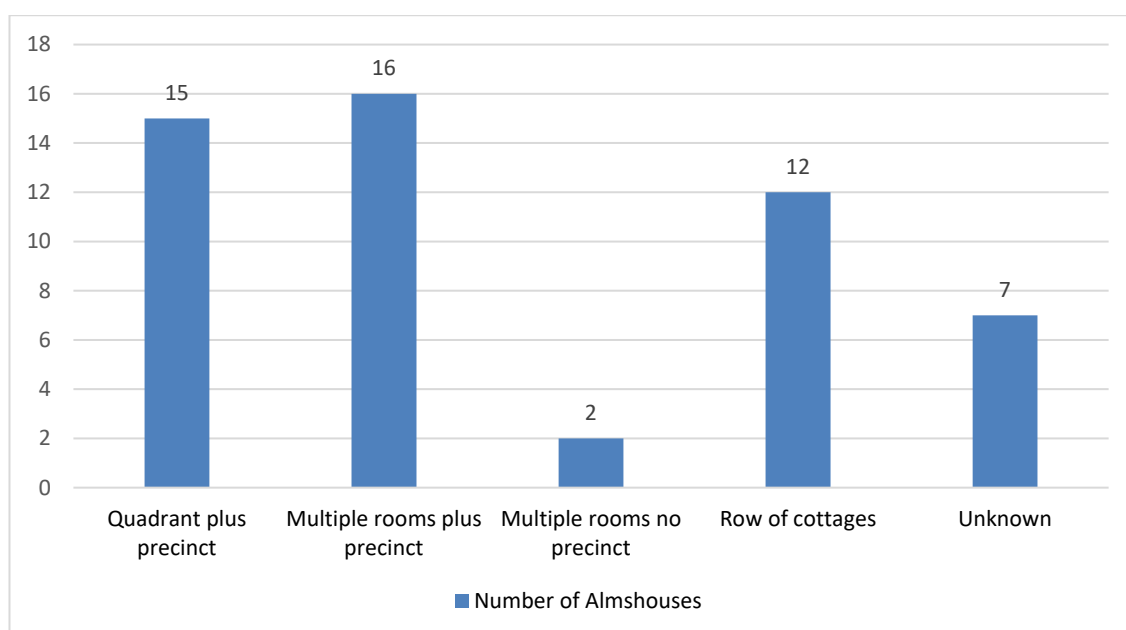
<sup>33</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space* (Oxford, 1991), p. 87; Harding, 'Space, Property and Propriety in Urban England', p. 562.

<sup>34</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 87.



include centripetal almshouses, of which she found two examples in Yorkshire, one of them from the sixteenth century in which six small rooms were built around a central hall and fireplace. The third type was a courtyard form, where small dwellings were built around a courtyard, and the fourth, 'The row', which she identifies as by far the most popular choice for almshouses. It continues to be so. Other building forms include the 'town house' and 'semis' and other groupings which include contemporary bungalows.<sup>35</sup>

*Figure 7.2: The built form of almshouses in London and Westminster 1330-1600*

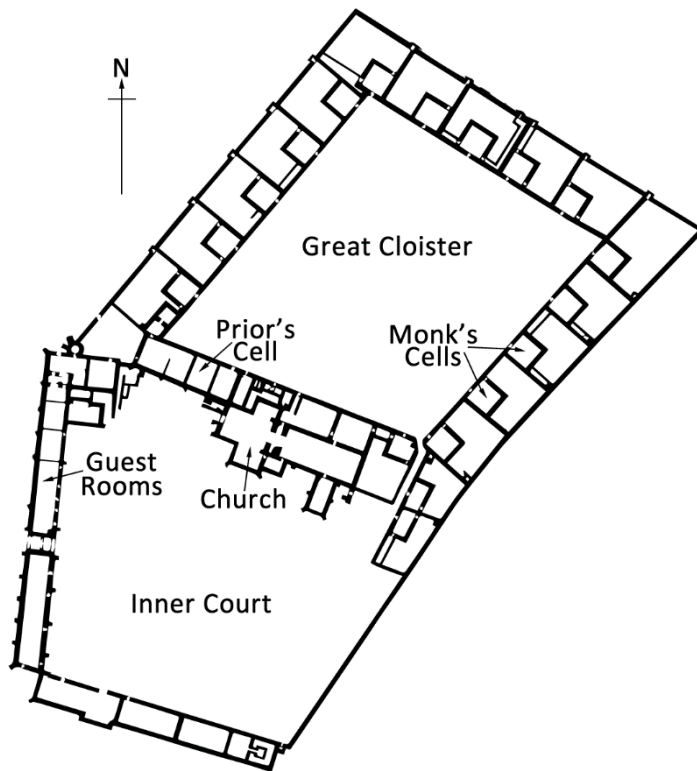


From the beginning of the development of almshouses in London and Westminster, there were four distinct architectural forms (see figure 7.2 The built form of almshouses above). The form of forty-five of the fifty-two almshouses is known. The most popular architectural form for almshouses in London and Westminster was separate units, each with its own front door, arranged together often in a square around a courtyard within a gated precinct and buildings with multiple single rooms in a precinct.

Fifteen of the fifty-two almshouses in London and Westminster during this period took this form. These include lavish developments with one or two-roomed dwellings with

<sup>35</sup> Helen Caffrey, 'Almshouse buildings: Form, function and meaning', in Nigel Goose, Helen Caffrey, Anne Langley eds., *The British Almshouse: New Perspectives on Philanthropy ca 1400-1914* (Milton Keynes, 2016), pp. 23-27.

communal areas around a courtyard, and smaller, more modest almshouses without communal buildings, built around the sides of an alley and converted into a precinct by



the use of a gate out onto the street. These almshouses appear to have taken some inspiration from Carthusian monasteries: the similarity in form is remarkable. In Carthusian monasteries each of the brothers had a small dwelling-place to himself complete with a chimney, personal privy, and a small garden, grouped in a quadrant around a courtyard (see figure 7.3 below).

*Figure 7.3: Mount Grace Charterhouse*

Adapted from: G. Coppack and M. Aston, *Christ's Poor Men: The Carthusians of England* (Stroud, 2002), p. 43.

The Carthusian monastery in

London, Charterhouse (founded in 1371), had a great reputation for piety among the citizens of London and in the fifteenth-century a few privileged lay people were allowed to enter into the guest rooms of the monastery for refreshment.<sup>36</sup> The cells of the lay brothers also followed the design of the monks' cells and these may have been more familiar to early almshouse founders.<sup>37</sup> This pattern of building also reflects trends in domestic building style in the late-medieval period. John Schofield and Geoffrey Stall found that larger urban residences were also often built around a courtyard on the street side, with a garden behind the main range.<sup>38</sup> The first almshouse of this form in London was built by the Merchant Taylors between the Merchant Taylors' Hall and St Martin Outwich in 1413. This was followed by Whittington's Almshouse, 1424, which was more elaborate, but followed a similar

<sup>36</sup> D. C. Knowles, 'The London Charterhouse', in Barron and Davies, *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, p. 252.

<sup>37</sup> Coppack and Aston, *Christ's Poor Men*, pp. 36, 111, 114.

<sup>38</sup> John Schofield and Geoffrey Stall, 'The built environment 1300-1540', in D. Palliser ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 385.

architectural pattern, as did Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse, 1595 (see figure 7.4: Photograph of Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse 1890 below).



Figure 7.4: Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse (Emmanuel Hospital) built in a quadrant format, photo 1890, showing the chapel and houses (the cottages and chapel were rebuilt in the eighteenth century).

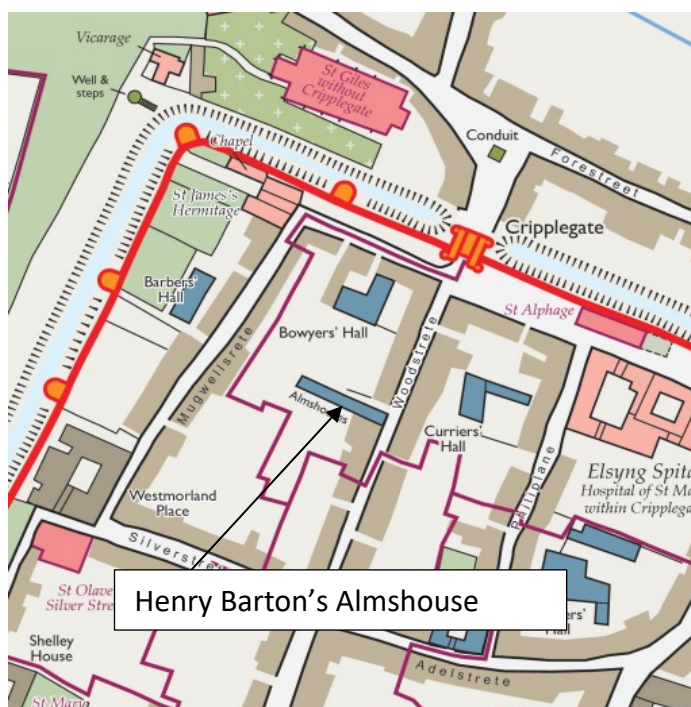


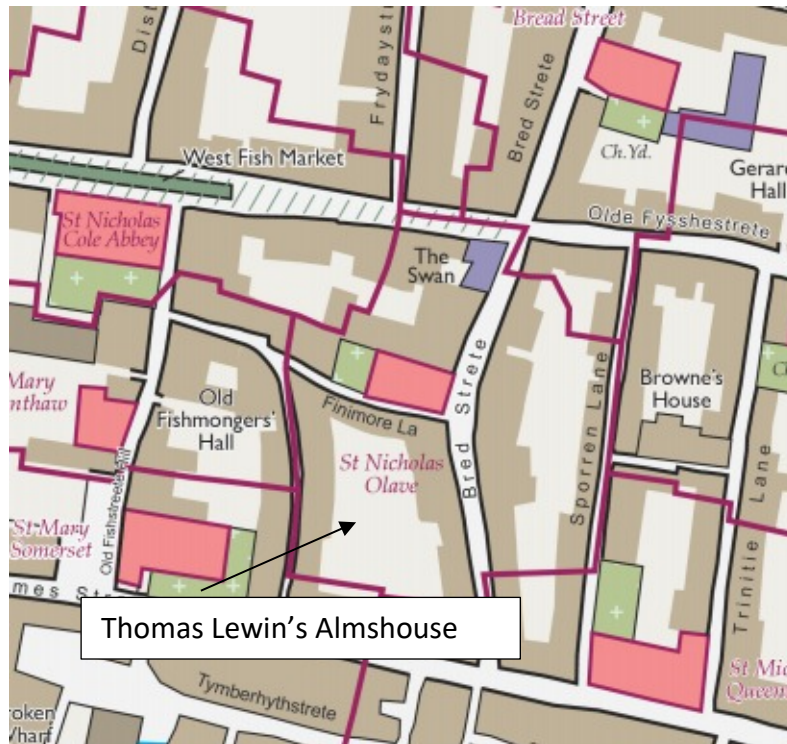
Figure 7.5: Map detail showing Henry Barton's Almshouse  
Map of Tudor London, eds., C. Barron & V. Harding, Historic Towns Trust, 2018

Henry Barton also built an almshouse, but he used an alley off Wood Street near to Cripplegate and built houses around an alley with a gate with locks, at the end facing onto the main thoroughfare (see figure 7.5: Map detail showing Henry Barton's Almshouse). This was a much more modest establishment without the communal areas and provision for kitchens and other



luxuries like laundry, but it did maintain the pattern of individual dwellings in a closed precinct.

Another humbler version of this style of almshouse involved small cottages or tenements being built within the parish Churchyard. This was a very clever and



*Figure 7.6: Map detail showing Thomas Lewin's Almshouse*  
Map of Tudor London, eds., C. Barron & V. Harding, Historic Towns Trust, 2018

economical way for parishioners and lay donors such as Thomas Lewin, who left his almshouse in the Churchyard of St Nicholas Olave to be managed by the Ironmongers' (see figure 7.6, Map detail of Thomas Lewin's Almshouse above), to achieve the architectural and social

effect of a larger quadrangle almshouse foundation with a large courtyard (or graveyard in this case). Henri Lefebvre's thesis on space discusses the dialectical relationship between real, material, and physical space. He saw space as a social construct, which is based on people producing meaning from the use of space.<sup>39</sup> The churchyard almshouses used the precinct of the church to endow the almshouses with the aura of a convent or priory and the alley almshouses use gates to provide the illusion of a precinct in a small area. Both churchyard and alley almshouses use the architecture available to them to construct religious and social meaning in the space they occupied that was far greater than the buildings would ordinarily warrant. Both grand quadrangle almshouses and the humbler alley and parish churchyard almshouses continued to be built during the whole period of this study.

<sup>39</sup> J. Schofield and A. Vince, *Medieval Towns* (London, 1994), p. 63.

Another popular form of almshouse during this period consisted of a single building with private rooms or apartments for residents, some communal areas, and a gated precinct. Sixteen almshouses within the study period followed this form (see figure 7.2 above). They include several almshouses that developed from older medieval hospitals, by partitioning the space into private rooms or adding separate almshouse accommodation within the original institution (see figure 7.7, Plan of St Katharine's Hospital below). A number of company halls also adopted this form of almshouse, often providing rooms or apartments for almspeople in their gatehouse, with the hall compound providing an extended precinct area for the almspeople with communal areas. These forms of almshouse became less popular as the period progressed. The last almshouse of this form in this study was founded by Sir Martin Bowes in 1557, when he provided for an almsman to reside in the gatehouse at the Goldsmiths' Hall.

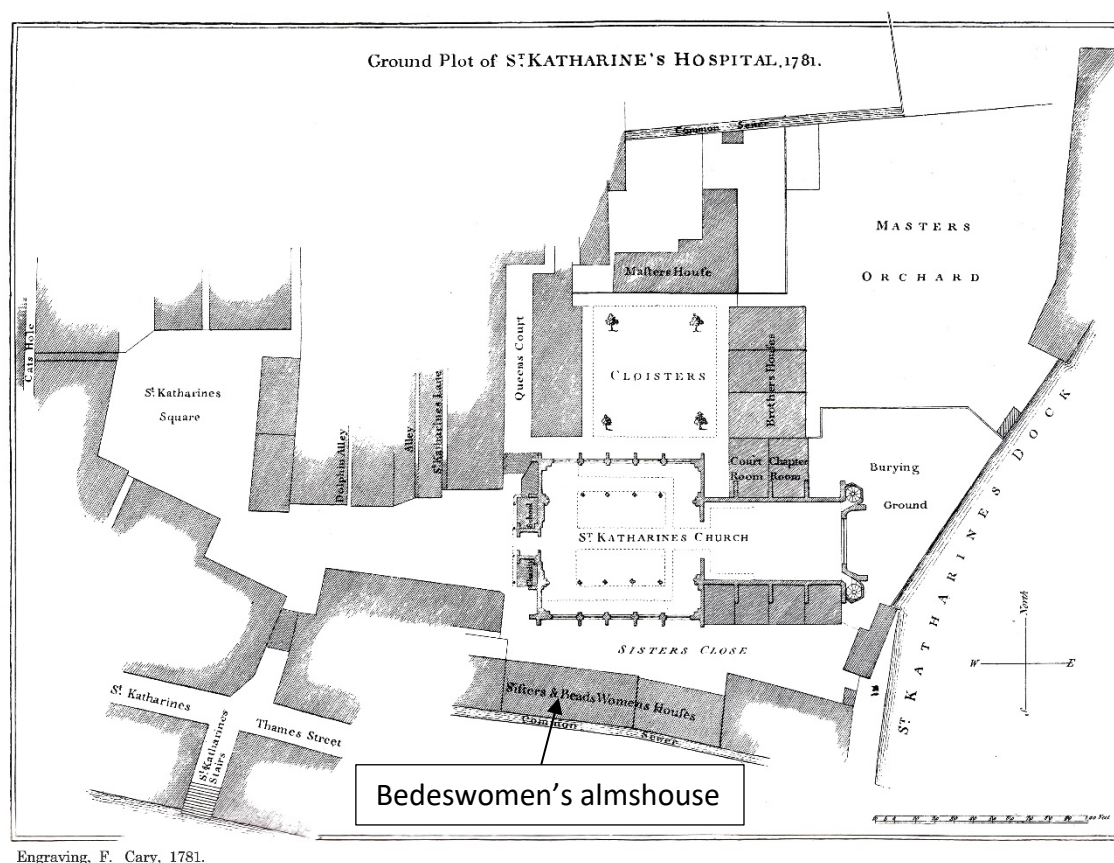


Figure 7.7: St Katharine's Hospital, including the Almshouse for the Bedeswomen, 1781<sup>40</sup>

<sup>40</sup> St Katharine's Church and Hospital, London: a ground-plan with scale and north point. Engraving by F. Cary. Wellcome Collection, Wellcome Library no. 22199i.

Only two almshouses in this study consisted of multiple rooms in a building without a precinct. Whittington's Longhouse was made up of six rooms built above a latrine on Tennis Court Dock. However, this form of multi-use almshouse was not uncommon outside the City. Robert Veel's Almshouse (1426) in Ilchester, Somerset, followed this format, which comprised a building with several rooms used as an almshouse with a room above used for parish meetings and the local school.<sup>41</sup>

The fourth type of almshouse began to develop around the end of the fifteenth century in London and Westminster. This constituted a row of small cottages or tenements, each with its own front door and usually a garden, not within a gated precinct but built in a way that showed the row was distinct from surrounding houses and giving the impression that they were a single community. Twelve almshouses in this study were in the form of a row of little cottages (see figure 7.2 above). Thomas Cook left the first almshouse of this type in London in 1478, but they became more popular in the sixteenth century, with examples being built by individual lay donors, such as Sir Thomas Gresham, Cornelius Van Dun (see figure 7.8, drawing of Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouse, Westminster, below), and Lady Emma Askew, and some religious institutions, like St Mary Bishopsgate (built before 1548) and Holy Trinity Priory (built in the first half of the sixteenth century).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>41</sup> Buckler, *Ilchester Almshouse Deeds*.

<sup>42</sup> Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, p. 139. See Appendix One, pp. 319, 318, 293, 306, 315, 302.

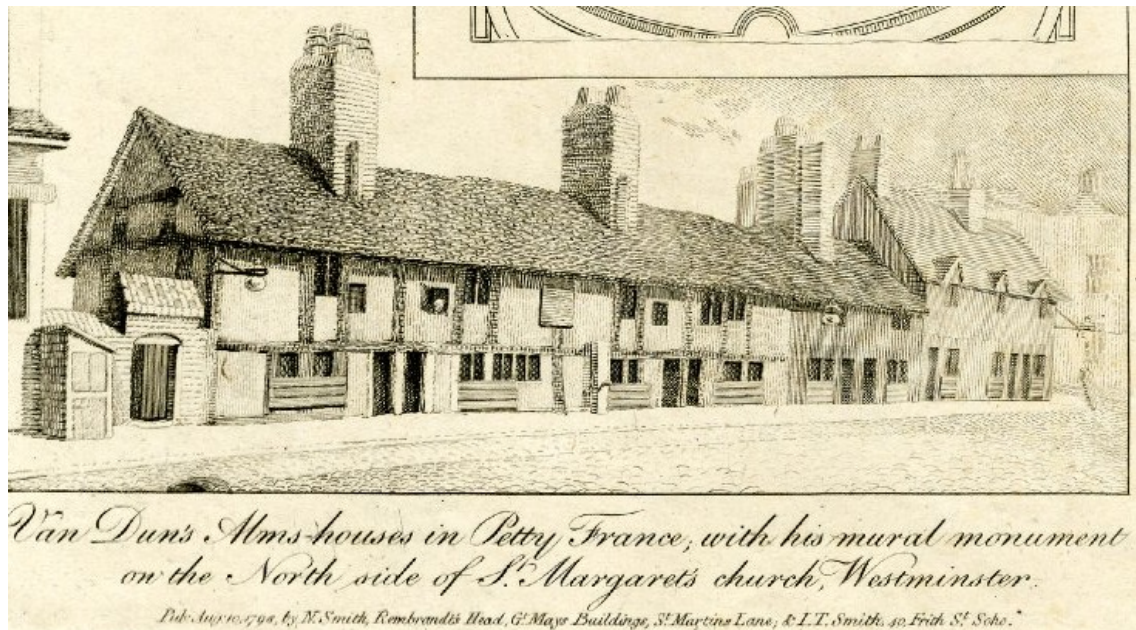


Figure 7.8: Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouses in Westminster<sup>43</sup>

This distribution of almshouse forms contrasts with the findings of Elaine Phillips in East Anglia. Phillips found that 'new style' almshouses, as compared to those which evolved from the older single hall medieval hospitals, only began to appear from the mid-fifteenth century.<sup>44</sup> These housed between two and twenty-four people occupying individual dwelling spaces, but Phillips does not give details of the variety of architecture of these establishments. In the Netherlands there seems to have been a similar diversity of structure among almshouses. Henk Looijestijn records sixteenth-century Dutch almshouses, including houses built around a court, single buildings with individual rooms and one entrance, and rows of small houses with a common backyard.<sup>45</sup> In both England and the Netherlands the building of almshouses consisting of a row of cottages seems to be a sixteenth-century development.<sup>46</sup>

Despite often close physical proximity to the main street, almshouses maintained their liminality by a number of devices. The boundary between the busy world of the street and the prayerful space of the almshouse was marked in some way, giving the appearance of separation and liminality even to spaces that fronted directly onto the

<sup>43</sup> Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouse: Petty France copper plate etching originally published by N. Smith for the Society of Antiquaries in 1798.

<sup>44</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p.121.

<sup>45</sup> Goose and Looijestijn, 'Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic', p. 1055.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.



street.<sup>47</sup> Frank Rexroth has argued that boundaries were important, that they emphasise difference between the margins and the centre. Rexroth used the example of city gates as sites for the expulsion of criminals, arguing that the city walls formed the moral boundary of the city in the minds of the ruling class and that the building of walls helped to form civic identity.<sup>48</sup>



*Figure 7.9: Milbourne's Almshouse Gate in the Seventeenth Century J. W. Archer, Image from British Library*

Gates and walls form an obvious boundary and, as we have seen, were used at the entrance to many almshouses, as a way of controlling who went out and who came in and protecting the residents from unwanted interruptions to their contemplation.<sup>49</sup> Just as they secluded the almshouse from the main street, gates were also

used to call attention to the presence of the almshouse. Henry Barton's Almshouse in an alley off Wood Street, close to Cripplegate, was separated from the main street by a

<sup>47</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 87.

<sup>48</sup> Frank Rexroth, *Grenzen Der Stadt, Grenzen Der Moral* (Gottingen, 2001), pp. 158-60.

<sup>49</sup> For further discussion on the use of almshouse gates to maintain privacy for residents see Chapter Six, pp. 210-212.



gate that was subject to some expensive repairs in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.<sup>50</sup> Other almshouse founders had costly inscriptions and decorations over their gates (see figure 7.9, Milbourne's Almshouse Gate in the Seventeenth Century above). Over the gateway to John Milbourne's Almshouse was a sculpture representing the assumption of the Virgin Mary, on each side of which was a shield bearing the arms of Sir John Milbourne and his wife Joane Hill. Below this were shields of the Drapers and the Merchants of the Staple. Beneath these was a Latin inscription:

Ad laudem Dei et gloriose Virginis Marie hoc opus erexit dominus Johannes  
Milbourne miles et alderman huius civitatis Ad 1535.<sup>51</sup>

Clearly John Milbourne intended that people would notice and admire him and his almshouse from the outside.

John Schofield and Geoffrey Stell suggested that:

The construction of the built environment in medieval British towns reflected both social values and personal initiatives or personal monument making...<sup>52</sup>

The built environment of the almshouse therefore reflected the social values, personal initiatives, and monuments of the wealthy civic elite in the City of London. The almshouses also spoke of the founder and were their memorial. Phillips noted the important role of almshouses as a memorial to the founders, noting the tendency to mark almshouses physically with their memory.<sup>53</sup> Angela Nicholls also wrote of the importance of early-modern almshouses as a physical representation of the virtue of the donor.<sup>54</sup>

However, almshouses had a multiplicity of meanings in the city. They were not just vehicles for memorial. They spoke of values of charity, civic responsibility and honour of the body politic, liminality, the marginality of the poor, monasticism, piety, and a devotion to the dead. The new factors that come to life when looking at the place of

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<sup>50</sup> GA MS 30727/2 Skinners' Company Receipts and Payments book 1491.

<sup>51</sup> 'To the glory of God and the glorious Virgin Mary this work was erected by Sir John Milbourne Knight and Alderman of this city in 1535', Milbourn, 'The Milbourne Alms-Houses,' p. 141.

<sup>52</sup> J. Schofield, and G. Stell, 'The Built Environment 1300-1540', D. Palliser ed., *The Cambridge Urban History of Britain* (Cambridge, 2000), p. 371.

<sup>53</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 122.

<sup>54</sup> Nicholls, *Almshouses in Early Modern England*, p. 75.

almshouses in the City of London is their role as a symbol for the way the civic elite thought about themselves, the urban community in which they lived and their ideals for urban life. In founding almshouses and placing them in the heart of the City the urban elite were taking the hospital, a religious symbol of charity and piety that, in London at least, was previously dominated by religious orders, and making it their own. The almshouses became islands of charity in the marginal spaces of the city (the back alleys) with a link to the main street, advertising to the passing world how great the city was. The almshouses were a concrete example of the body politic at work, care for the honourable poor and marginalised, the hands and feet of the body politic, whose wellbeing was essential for the health of the whole.<sup>55</sup> They were a demonstration of the increasing power and confidence of the civic elite, mirroring the charitable practice of religious institutions and thereby demonstrating growing confidence in their control of their relationship with God, and confidence in their own abilities and knowledge to shape the urban environment to reflect the ideal godly society they wanted to inhabit.

## 7.2. Almshouses in the Neighbourhood

We have seen that almshouses were initially built in the heart of the urban community, and that their topographical position and built form spoke both of the liminal status of the residents and their occupation in praying for the living and the dead, and of the self-promotion and ideals of the founders, the civic elite and the organisations that managed the almshouses. However, we have also seen that the influence of architecture on the local community (and vice-versa), was not limited to the boundaries of buildings. The relationship between public and private space and the community that occupies those spaces was complex. Lefebvre felt that although spaces appear to be separated, they are in fact continuous.<sup>56</sup>

The boundary between the private space of the almshouse and the public space of the urban street was permeable and the interaction between members of the almshouse and the community outside was intertwined. Harding added to this complexity when

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<sup>55</sup> For more about Body Politic, see p. 270 below.

<sup>56</sup> Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, p. 87.

she reminded us that the way communities interact across boundaries and in space is also subject to changes across time.<sup>57</sup>

Almspeople interacted with a wide variety of people on a regular basis. Ian Archer has argued that urban societies consisted of 'a matrix of overlapping communities'.<sup>58</sup>

Almspeople sat at the heart of the city in the middle of a particularly complex web of communities. Berry suggested that there were multiple levels of neighbourhood community within the medieval city and almshouses were part of many intersecting communities of company, craft, family, fraternity, friends, neighbours, parish, city and state and, importantly, for almsfolk, the community of the dead.<sup>59</sup> All these communities expected some degree of loyalty and identity as a factor of membership and therefore brought the potential for conflict and discord, as well as peace and harmony, as they interacted with each other. Miri Rubin found that the Augustinian Houses were well aware of the potentially disturbing nature of conflicting loyalties with different communities, and therefore tried to restrict interaction with the world outside through their religious rule.<sup>60</sup> The rule of life of many almshouses in London was based on the Augustinian example, and their rules could give the impression that they lived, as Christine Fox put it, in 'communal isolation'.<sup>61</sup> However, for most almshouses in the City of London and Westminster the practicalities of life worked against restriction in contact with the outside world. Almshouse residents regularly interacted with people both inside and outside the almshouse.

The relationship between public and private space and the community that occupied those spaces is challenging to assess. Nevertheless, that is what I shall attempt to do here, examining the spaces within the almshouse community that were permeable and the types of exchanges that took place within these spaces, the impact of almspeople on the local community in terms of the places they visited, the types of interaction they had and their relationship with the community of the dead.

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<sup>57</sup> Harding, 'Space, Property and Propriety', p. 569.

<sup>58</sup> Ian W. Archer, *The Pursuit of Stability: Social Relations in Elizabethan London* (Cambridge, 1991), p. 61.

<sup>59</sup> Berry, 'Margins and marginality', pp. 12-13.

<sup>60</sup> Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 176.

<sup>61</sup> Fox, 'The Royal Almshouse at Westminster', p. 145.

Almshouses differed from traditional medieval hospitals in terms of their permeability to the local community. As we have seen, traditional medieval hospitals and *leprosaria* were usually built outside the city walls on marginalised or unproductive land close to a main thoroughfare and often associated with bridges or river crossings.<sup>62</sup> They often had quite an extensive footprint and included outbuildings, barns, shelter and grazing for animals and productive kitchen gardens. In addition to this the traditional medieval hospitals often possessed extensive endowments of rural farmland, which contributed produce, grain, or animals to the hospital. This income was supplemented by the collection of alms from passing travellers. As a result of this, the hospitals were, to some extent, self-sufficient.<sup>63</sup> However, even the richest, most self-sufficient hospitals had some degree of permeability to the local community, beyond the care of the sick poor. St Mary Bishopsgate, for example, was a key 'actor' in the local area as a landlord, a venue for public preaching, the perfect site on the road into Bishopsgate to beg alms, and the destination of civic processions (of which more later).<sup>64</sup>

As discussed above, the almshouses of London were also gated or topographically separated communities, like the medieval hospitals, but they had a quite different relationship with the local community. They were often squeezed into back alleys in built-up urban areas, surrounded by other buildings or a courtyard. Even Whittington's Almshouse, one of the wealthiest, had little space for a garden, certainly not large enough to supply it with enough food. Whittington's Almshouse had extensive endowments, which, like the other local almshouses, were mainly in the city and paid their rent in money rather than goods or produce.

Medieval hospitals were usually managed by a master, who was given a stipend for his work, and they were often staffed by cooks, laundresses, gardeners, and fraternity members. People were employed to cook, clean, wash and maintain the premises. Almshouses were, conversely, managed by the residents in terms of cooking, cleaning, washing and medical attendance (bar a few establishments). The almshouse administrators confined themselves to building maintenance and the provision of

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<sup>62</sup> Rawcliffe, 'The Earthly and Spiritual Topography of Suburban Hospitals', p. 253.

<sup>63</sup> Rawcliffe, 'The Earthly and Spiritual Topography of Suburban Hospitals', pp. 261-262.

<sup>64</sup> Berry, 'Margins and marginality', p. 60.

varying levels of alms. These two factors, provisioning and staffing, were the cause of a fundamental change in relationship with the local community. Some interactions with the local community occurred when outsiders came into the almshouse. Other interactions occurred when almspeople came out of the almshouse into the local community.

Visitors to the almshouse included tradesmen repairing its fabric, and others delivering goods and fuel. Keeping warm in the winter presented a much bigger problem for the urban poor than those in the countryside. Christopher Dyer suggested that peasant families enjoyed greater access to woodlands where they could collect fuel following the Black Death.<sup>65</sup> The procurement of fuel in the City was far more expensive as everything had to be transported and delivered.<sup>66</sup> Despite this, only thirteen of the fifty-two almshouses in the study (25 per cent) show evidence of fuel being provided. For example, in 1578, Sir Ambrose Nicholas provided for each of his almspeople to receive five sacks of charcoal and twenty-five faggots a year.<sup>67</sup> In an additional will Sir Ambrose Nicholas left £100 to be distributed as a loan between two poor young men of the Salters' Company on condition that they give two loads of thirty sacks of coal (well filled) every year that they have the loan to the twelve poor men and women of his almshouse. Each almsperson was to receive a twelfth part of the coal.<sup>68</sup> Some almshouses like Sir Ambrose Nicholas's left specific instructions about the amount of fuel to be given to each almsperson. Others, for example Galliard's almshouse, provided a cartload of charcoal which could then be distributed between the residents.<sup>69</sup> By the sixteenth century some founders had begun to leave payments in lieu of fuel: for example, Robert Tyrwitt left 16s to be given to each almsperson for fuel at Christmas.<sup>70</sup> In 1587 the Merchant Taylors agreed to give the residents of Richard Hill's almshouse £8 15s yearly for fuel.<sup>71</sup>

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<sup>65</sup> Dyer, *Standards of living in the later Middle Ages*, p. 177.

<sup>66</sup> James A. Galloway, Derek Keene and Margaret Murphy, 'Fuelling the City: Production and Distribution of Firewood and Fuel in London's Region, 1290-1400', *The Economic History Review* 49 3 (1996), p. 448. Dyer, *Standards of living in the later Middle Ages*, p. 209.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 261.

<sup>70</sup> *Endowed Charities*, pp. 215 - 216.

<sup>71</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 122.

Other activities that involved people from outside the almshouse community entering through the gates were repairs and renovations to the fabric of the buildings. The Skinners' Company has accounts for upkeep and repairs to Henry Barton's Almshouse from 1491 to 1574. These included repairs to the almshouse gate and locks, repairs to windows and doors in 1491, the building of a 'pentice' (a lean-to-shed or other construction attached to a building or a sloping roof for a gate or walkway) in 1492, roof repairs in 1496, repairs to the chimneys in 1498, regular emptying of the latrines and payments to the night soil men, and in 1574 an extensive refurbishment of the premises.<sup>72</sup> These activities involved extensive, often intrusive, access into the almshouse and must have disturbed the peace of the residents.

Some activities required able-bodied almshouse residents to go out into the local community to purchase food and other necessary supplies. Only seven almshouses, out of fifty-two in this study, provided food and communal eating, though the records are incomplete and other institutions may well have also encouraged this form of interaction. Eating communally in a refectory reflected the way of life in monasteries or medieval colleges, and, to emphasise this connection, the almspeople at Whittington's Almshouse (founded 1424) ate communally with the members of Whittington's College. These seven almshouses were all wealthy and prestigious. Two, Elsyngspital (1330) and St Katharine's (1354), were founded in the fourteenth century. A further two almshouses were founded in the early fifteenth century: Whittington's Almshouse (1424) and St Augustine Papey (1442); and three almshouses: Henry VII's Almshouse (1502), Lady Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse (1502) and Jesus Commons (1507), were founded in the early sixteenth century.<sup>73</sup> Eating communally required the cooking of meals on a large scale and so must have provided local businesses with a reliable income. The purchase of bread, vegetables, fish and (occasionally) meat is listed in the archives of Elsyngspital, and these provisions were probably delivered to the almshouse on a regular basis.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> GA MS 30727/1, MS 30727/2, MS 30727/3 Skinners' Company Receipts and Payments books.

<sup>73</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 297, 314, 321, 312, 300, 307, 303.

<sup>74</sup> See Chapter Five, pp. 159-165.

However, a large proportion of the remaining forty-three almshouses did not provide a space specifically for communal eating. John Hasilwood's Almshouse (1544) included a communal room, but there is no indication this was definitely used as a refectory, and the almspeople's benefits included a small pension and fuel, not food.<sup>75</sup> In 1543 Thomas Huntlow left an endowment which gave each member of the almshouse a meal once a quarter. This comprised:

1d bread, 1d ale, 2d 'flesh sodden in porrage', 4d money to be given between nine and eleven o'clock in the forenoon every quarter day.<sup>76</sup>

Many almspeople therefore had to source and prepare their own meals, unless they were sick or incapacitated, when residents were expected to assist each other.<sup>77</sup> The expectation of charity towards other residents within the almshouse obviously resulted in some pooling of resources and some measure of communal cooking and provisioning, but there were seldom spatial resources provided for this activity.<sup>78</sup> Many almspeople had to make do with the small hearths in their dwellings and to go out of the almshouse to purchase provisions or prepared food in the local area on a daily basis.<sup>79</sup>

Another potential way that almspeople could come into contact with the local population was through begging for alms, which was an essential part of the life of medieval *leprosaria* and hospitals. For many the collection of alms was essential for their survival.<sup>80</sup> Begging was also a culturally acceptable behaviour for poor people who depended on the older medieval hospitals for support and help in need. It gave the opportunity for the rich to be charitable and gain honour in heaven and offered the poor and impotent some means of subsistence. However, as the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries progressed, attitudes to the poor began to change. Miri Rubin charted this change in medieval Cambridgeshire, from the attitude that all poor people were in the image of Christ, to the development of the concept of the deserving and

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<sup>75</sup> See Appendix One, p. 304.

<sup>76</sup> *Endowed Charities*, pp. 475- 476.

<sup>77</sup> See Chapter Five, pp. 159-165.

<sup>78</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>79</sup> Carlin, 'Fast Food and Urban Living Standards in Medieval England', p. 49.

<sup>80</sup> Rawcliffe, 'The Earthly and Spiritual Topography of Suburban Hospitals', p. 263.

undeserving poor.<sup>81</sup> The residents of almshouses were expected to be the worthy poor, or the 'honest and Godly poor'.<sup>82</sup> But for some almshouses begging was part of their heritage.

John Stow reported that in his youth devout people, men and women of London, would walk past the cottages of Holy Trinity Almshouse, especially on Fridays, and give the residents alms. He wrote that every poor man and woman would lie in their beds by the open window, which contained a clean linen cloth and prayer beads, a sign to the passers-by that they were bedridden and devout and in need of alms.<sup>83</sup> The same seems to have been true of the almshouse of St Nicholas Harbledown in Kent. St Nicholas had evolved into an almshouse from its origins as a leper hospital. Lepers traditionally begged from passers-by and the aged residents of St Nicholas seem to have been keen on keeping the tradition going. Erasmus's account of the perils of pilgrimage from London to Canterbury to the tomb of St Thomas Becket included the difficulties encountered passing the almspeople at St Nicholas Harbledown. He wrote: 'In soche a way I had leuer haue an almes howse of olde folks, then a company of stronge theues'.<sup>84</sup>

However, the spectacle of almspeople on the street was a difficult issue for many almshouse founders. William Elsyng, the founder of Elsyngspital, the first almshouse in the City of London (1330), initially expected the residents to go out and beg for their food elsewhere in the City, but eventually food was provided at Elsyngspital. As we have seen, as time progressed many almshouses used the Augustinian rule as the basis for their own rules and these attempted to restrict contact with the outside world in order to maintain the honour and good name of the establishment.<sup>85</sup> However, almspeople still needed to live and they were poor. Many almshouses got around this problem by providing some form of pension, but this was not always enough to live on. Wealthy almshouses such as Whittington's and Henry VII's included statutes that

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<sup>81</sup> For further discussion on the change in attitude to the poor see Chapter Two, pp. 68-75. Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 295.

<sup>82</sup> Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse, Charity Commission Report 31 May 1889, *Parochial Charities of Westminster* (London, 1890), pp. 63-65.

<sup>83</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 124.

<sup>84</sup> Desiderius Erasmus, *A Pilgrimage of Pure Devotion 1536* (Urbana, Illinois, 2005), p. E vi.

<sup>85</sup> Rubin, *Charity and Community*, p. 176.



forbade residents to be away from the almshouse overnight or out of the almshouse without permission.<sup>86</sup> Other almshouse founders included rules that restricted the ways in which almspeople could earn extra money. As we have seen, Sir John Milbourne required of the people living in his almshouse that 'They should be of good conversation and not sell ale or wine'.<sup>87</sup> The almspeople who resided within company halls often supplemented their alms by doing small jobs.<sup>88</sup>

The importance of almspeople having a respectable means to supplement their pensions, within their limited capacity, was a problem that continued to vex some almshouse founders in the late sixteenth century. Elaine Phillips found that Sir William Cordell, founder of an almshouse in Long Melford, Suffolk, in 1591, expected his beneficiaries to perform useful work, in addition to their religious duties, so that none was idle.<sup>89</sup> In Westminster, Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse (Emmanuel Hospital, 1595), provided for twenty poor aged people, who were each required to foster an orphaned child, who would be educated in the attached school.

The direction of almspeople away from begging or from earning money in other, less honourable, activities indicates that, in contrast to the position adopted by many medieval hospitals, begging was not regarded as a culturally appropriate activity for almshouse residents. Carole Rawcliffe found that many late medieval and Tudor guild almshouses around England expected their almspeople to be occupied in some form of dignified labour, be that working or praying, in a way that she suggested pre-figured the post-Reformation concept of the protestant work ethic.<sup>90</sup> This is born out in the medieval and Tudor almshouses of London and Westminster where almsfolk need to earn money to live, combined with the desire of the founders that, as representatives of the almshouse, they should engage in respectable, dignified, honourable labour.

Another activity that had a profound effect on the residents' interactions with the local community involved the relationship between the almshouse and parish church.

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<sup>86</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 119; BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 43v.

<sup>87</sup> Milbourn, 'The Milbourn Alms-Houses', pp. 139-152.

<sup>88</sup> Caroline Metcalfe, 'William Porlond', pp. 32-36, also for more information on pensions see Chapter Six, pp. 226-227.

<sup>89</sup> Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 69.

<sup>90</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?', p. 14.

Traditional medieval hospitals incorporated a hospital ward into the nave of a church. The place of daily worship was onsite, and worship and the observation of Mass could often be accomplished from the sick bed. By contrast, in the City of London and Westminster, it was usual for almspeople to attend the local parish church for worship and prayer.<sup>91</sup> Almspeople were often long-term residents and not acutely unwell and so were able to visit the parish Church. The parish priest had the same responsibility for their souls as he did for his other parishioners. The almspeople were often expected to attend Church more often than other parishioners, but daily attendance at Mass was common for devout people during the fifteenth century.<sup>92</sup> The parish Church was a space occupied by both almspeople and other local parishioners and given the regularity of Church attendance in the general population in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, almspeople would have been a familiar part of the social fabric of the parish.

The daily life of early almshouses was a round of prayer for the dead and the living (but mostly the dead). Therefore, the community of the dead was particularly important for almspeople. The fourteenth and fifteenth-century foundations often required a rigorous timetable of services and prayers both in the parish Church and in the almshouse.<sup>93</sup> The lightest requirements were daily Mass and prayers for the founder's souls and the souls of the departed. Almspeople were often expected to undertake prayer work, helping the poor souls in purgatory, even when resting.<sup>94</sup> For some almshouses this relationship with the dead was taken one step further. As we have seen, at least five almshouses were built within the precinct of the parish churchyard, physically positioned within the precinct of the dead, at least another eleven were founded either within or on the boundary of a church precinct such as a friary, abbey, priory or hospital or with their own chapel. As the fifteenth century progressed, building on the boundary of the churchyard became quite common. Many chambers and sometimes shops were built, such as the boundary to the Westminster Almonry.<sup>95</sup> With people attending Church on a daily basis, it made sense to position shops close to

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<sup>91</sup> See Chapters Five pp 170-173.

<sup>92</sup> Duffy, *Stripping of the Altars*, p. 99.

<sup>93</sup> See Chapter Five, pp. 169-170.

<sup>94</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 115.

<sup>95</sup> Neil Rushton, 'Spatial Aspects of the Almonry Site', pp. 66-91.

the regular foot traffic. However, the almshouses within the Churchyard were conveniently placed for the almspeople to attend Church with minimum energy and to be regularly reminded by the presence of the graves to pray for the dead. They were also conveniently situated to attend the funerals of the rich and other city ceremonies.

### 7.3 Almshouses and Ceremony in the City

One demonstration of the honour embodied in the almshouse institution is its role in the ceremonial life of the city. Charles Phythian-Adams' 1972 study of the ceremonial life of late-medieval and early-modern Coventry demonstrated the central importance of civic ceremonial activities to the maintenance of stability in the urban community.<sup>96</sup> Phythian-Adams viewed civic ceremony as a 'living mirror' of an urban community's ideal image of itself. He described the repetitive patterns of civic ceremony as corresponding closely to the social structure of the city, reminding those included (the social elite) and excluded (women, apprentices and others), of their place in the body politic of the city. This paper started a whole genre of studies looking at civic ceremony in urban areas and its interaction with the social, political and religious life of the city. Urban ceremonial behaviours and rituals sat at an intersection between civic rulers, religion, the participants, the audience, and the space in which they took place.

I have already discussed the role of space and topography in the development of the communities inhabiting the city. Now the discussion moves to the narrative constructed by civic and religious ceremony about the nature of almspeople and their (symbolic) relevance to the community they lived in. To do this it is essential to understand the nature of civic ceremony and religion, its role in the city and the symbolic role played by almspeople within these ceremonies. This includes their role in funerals and obits, daily religious services, the symbolism of their dress, and their role in the civic ceremony of the city.

Almspeople, both those who resided in almshouses and others supported by City companies in the community, played a key role in the prestigious funerals and obit ceremonies within the city as regularly recorded in the archives. It was customary for

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<sup>96</sup> C. Phythian-Adams, 'Ceremony and the citizen: the communal year at Coventry, 1450-1550', in P. Clark and P. Slack eds., *Crisis and Order in English Towns 1500-1700* (1972), pp. 86-116.

poor people to attend the funerals of the rich or well to do. Their presence was both practical and symbolic. The will of the deceased would often provide alms for poor people who attended the funeral in the form of money or food and drink. The poor people themselves were there as symbols of the deceased's charity during his or her life, a recipient of charity at the funeral in the form of alms and, as discussed above, a living symbol of *pauperes Christi*. The attendance of poor people at funerals was practical as charity was considered a real and present relief to the soul of the dead in purgatory; by providing charity at a funeral, the individual gave direct comfort to the departed soul. Henry Machyn documented the attendance of 'poor people' at nearly every funeral he recorded, and as a purveyor of cloth associated with funerals, he documented many. These funerals were also public events with a procession, a religious service and some form of feast. Machyn only recorded the funerals of the rich and powerful and these were lavish affairs, but the representatives of the poor were centre stage. Some of the funerals Machyn recorded were of almshouse founders, as in the case of Andrew Judd, on 14 September 1558, which reads as follows:

The fourteenth day of September was buried Sir Andrew Judde, skinner, merchant of Muscovy and late mayor of London, with a pennon of arms, ten dozen of escutcheons, and a hearse of wax of five principals garnished with angels. And ... poor men in new gowns and two heralds: Mr. Clarenceux, king of arms, and Mr. Somerset, herald ... Mass and a sermon. And after, my lord mayor and the aldermen had dinner.<sup>97</sup>

Andrew Judd lived in community with his almspeople in his house at Great St Helens before his death; they were referred to several times in his will, and they were left additional endowments by both Andrew Judd's wife and daughter.<sup>98</sup> A key part of their role was to pray for Andrew Judd's soul, the souls of his family, the souls of members of the Skinners' Company, the King (or Queen), and all Christian souls. Therefore, it is likely they did attend his funeral. Rawcliffe records that funeral and obit alms could be assigned to specific poor men and women, who had followed the body of the deceased

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<sup>97</sup> Henry Machyn, *A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550-1563*, Richard W. Bailey, Marilyn Miller, and Colette Moore eds., <<https://quod.lib.umich.edu/m/machyn/>> [accessed 20<sup>th</sup> October 2019], f. 92r.

<sup>98</sup> TNA PROB 11/42A/493 (1558) - Andrew Judd's Will.

and held candles during the funerary Mass.<sup>99</sup> So perhaps Andrew Judd's almspeople were the 'poor men in new gowns' to whom Henry Machyn referred.

The attendance and prayers of almswomen at her funeral was also very important to the Countess of Kent. The 1538 Indenture concerning the establishment of almshouses at Whitefriars states that:

Immediately after the decease of the Countess, the Master and Wardens shall cause the Almswomen and Porter to report and come to the Masses of Our Lady and to Evensong and Compline and the Masses there founded for the Earl and Countess and for the Masses of Requiem, Diriges and Obits there to be celebrated and maintained in the chancel of the house of Whitefriars for the souls of the Earl and Countess, there continually to abide and remain in a place now appointed for them by the Countess at the end of the tomb of the Earl and Countess during the whole time of the Masses, Evensong, Compline, Diriges and Obits in prayer and contemplation for the souls of the Earl and Countess and for the souls of their ancestors, kinsfolk and friends and all Christian souls.<sup>100</sup>

The requirement of attendance of the almspeople is also implicit in William Hopkynson's will. In 1518 he left 6d to every member of the commons of St Anthony of Vienne who attended his burying.<sup>101</sup> The commons of St Anthony of Vienne were comprised of brothers, clerks, school children and almsmen.

The attendance and prayers of almspeople at the annual obit, another public event, was also popular. The obit, or anniversary Mass, was a two-day event that was celebrated annually in the founder's parish church, to help their soul in purgatory. The ceremony replicated many of the rites associated with funerals. The rites began the afternoon before the anniversary of internment with the Vespers of the Dead (*Placebo*) and continued the following morning with the Matins and Lauds of the Dead (*Dirige*) and continued with a Requiem Mass.<sup>102</sup> Claire Schen considered obits and other services for the dead central to the parochial life of the parish.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>99</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 288.

<sup>100</sup> CCA, CL/G/MSS/Angell/5/21/23.

<sup>101</sup> William Hopkynson's Will, 25 March 1518, in Darlington, *London Consistory Court Wills*, p. 34.

<sup>102</sup> Clive Burgess, 'A service for the dead: the form and function of the anniversary in late medieval Bristol', *Transactions of the Bristol and Gloucestershire Archaeological Society*, 105 (1987), pp. 183-184.

<sup>103</sup> Claire S. Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety in Reformation London, 1500-1620* (Aldershot, 2002), p. 43.

The role of the Goldsmiths' almsmen, called the almsmen of St Dunstan, was strongly associated with the celebration of obits. William Herbert recorded that:

A great part of the beadle's duties, and almost wholly those of the almsfolk, were connected with the keeping of [the annual celebration of St Dunstan's day] and the company's other obits.<sup>104</sup>

The twelve almsmen were reminded of upcoming obits every Wednesday and Friday. Almsmen not attending forfeited their alms. During the obit the almsmen surrounded the altar or bier holding great wax tapers: '...everyday their withered hands held up toward heaven'.<sup>105</sup>

In 1558 Thomas Beaumont left 12d to the beadle of the Salters' Company for going with the almspeople of his almshouse to St Magnus' Church to celebrate his obit each year.<sup>106</sup> Thomas Kneseworth's will (1515) states that the poor people of the Fishmongers' Company, which he provided with money for an almshouse, should pray for the souls of Thomas Kneseworth and his wife and attend his obit.<sup>107</sup> Sir John Milbourne left directions that his obit was to be celebrated in the Church of the Crossed Friars with the thirteen almsmen from his almshouse gathered round his tomb.<sup>108</sup> Goldsmith Martin Bowes also required an element of theatricality, along with the attendance of his almsman, who lived at the Goldsmiths' Hall, at his obit. A learned preacher was to make a sermon yearly in the parish Church of St Mary Woolnoth, Lombard Street, where Martin Bowes was a parishioner, on the feast-day of St Martin Bishop in November. The sermon was to be attended by the four wardens, twelve assistants and two renters of the associated properties. The preacher was to be paid 6s 8d for the sermon and the wardens were to be given 1s 4d, and the assistants 1s for attending. The renters were to provide a dinner for the wardens, assistants and renters and were to receive 2s, the clerk of the company and beadle 1s 4d. Every almsman of

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<sup>104</sup> Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London*, 2 p. 215. My thanks to Anne Clarke for her help with understanding the role of the Goldsmiths' almsmen.

<sup>105</sup> Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London*, 2 p. 216. Herbert appears to be paraphrasing William Shakespeare, *Henry V* Act IV, i.

<sup>106</sup> *Endowed Charities*, p. 291.

<sup>107</sup> *Endowed Charities*, p. 563.

<sup>108</sup> Milbourn, 'The Milbourn Almshouses', p. 140.

the company present was to receive 4d and the clerk of the church 8d for tolling the bell.<sup>109</sup>

The concept of purgatory and therefore the rites associated with intercession for the dead, such as the obits and anniversary masses, was abolished at the Dissolution. However, the habit and practice of anniversary masses was harder to eradicate.<sup>110</sup> The Skinners' accounts demonstrate that they still celebrated Henry Barton's obit in 1557.<sup>111</sup> By the late sixteenth century obits had been subsumed into the livery company's annual feast day.

Funeral and Obit services were not the only types of service that almspeople were required to attend. As discussed in Chapter Five, the contribution of almspeople to the ceremonial life of the city also extended to daily church services. For example, in 1424 Richard Whittington's almsfolk were required to be present at matins, Mass, evensong, compline and 'other houres of holy Chirche'.<sup>112</sup> The Church referred to was St Michael Paternoster, adjacent to the almshouse and the services attended by the almspeople were public. The daily attendance of almspeople at public Church services was a common requirement of living in an almshouse.

Almspeople were also required to attend other corporate religious ceremonies such as saints' day celebrations. The Goldsmiths' annual celebration of St Dunstan's day was an elaborate affair which started the day before the anniversary. All the goldsmiths shut their shops and attended the company hall to hear the new warden's oaths and then processed to St Paul's Church to celebrate Mass at the Chapel of St Dunstan. After this they processed back to the Church of St John Zachary where the: 'best hersse-clothe, and waxe, be provyded and made ready by the almesmen, accordyng to the olde custome'.<sup>113</sup> The company then prayed for their living and dead brothers and sisters whilst the almsmen held torches around the altar.

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<sup>109</sup> *Endowed Charities*, p. 518.

<sup>110</sup> Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety in Reformation London*, p. 98.

<sup>111</sup> GL MS 30727/3.

<sup>112</sup> 'The Ordinances of Whittington's Almshouse' in Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 115.

<sup>113</sup> Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies*, 2 p. 215.

An important part of the St Dunstan's Day service involved wearing their best livery and this included the almsmen who were to wear their best black gowns. Providing clothing for the poor was one of the seven works of bodily mercy.<sup>114</sup> Bequests for gowns for the poor to wear to the testator's funeral were popular both before and after the Dissolution.<sup>115</sup> These gowns were often left to 'poor men' who might also be required to carry torches at the testator's funeral.<sup>116</sup>

The importance of clothing and almsmen as emblems of both individual and corporate charity is emphasised by the testamentary bequest of gowns to named almsmen at the Goldsmiths' company in 1517.<sup>117</sup> As exemplars of both godly poverty and individual and corporate charity, almsmen were required to wear some form of recognisable dress that marked them out from others in church and in the street. In Act Three of William Shakespeare's *Richard II*, the King says: 'I'll give... my gay apparel for an almsman's gown...'<sup>118</sup>

Like pilgrims, and the residents of *leprosaria*, the almspeople often wore a distinctive gown or cloak of modest colour, sometimes marked with a cross or coat-of-arms, that differentiated them from the other people of the city and marked them out as a member of a group. Almsmen at Whittington's Almshouse (1424) were required to wear cloaks of a dark brown colour:

Moreover we ordeyne that the Overclothing of the Tutor and pouer folk of the seid Almeshouse be derk and broune of Colour and not staring ne blasing and of esy prised cloth according to their degre.<sup>119</sup>

Also, the poor folk of Henry VII's Almshouse (1502) wore warm gowns of brown with a red rose on the left shoulder:

..a long gowne & a hode redy made of browne russet that is to sey to the prest a gowne and a hode redy made conteynyng foure yerdes of brode cloth & to euery

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<sup>114</sup> Sheila Sweetinburgh, 'Clothing the Naked in Late Medieval East Kent', in Catherine Richardson, ed., *Clothing Culture, 1350-1650* (Abingdon, 2004), pp. 109-122.

<sup>115</sup> Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety in Reformation London*, pp. 100, 157.

<sup>116</sup> Schen, *Charity and Lay Piety in Reformation London*, pp. 55, 57.

<sup>117</sup> Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies*, 2 p. 210.

<sup>118</sup> William Shakespeare, *Richard II*, Act III, iii. 131-133.

<sup>119</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 116. Rawcliffe, "A mighty force in the ranks of Christ's army", p. 103.



of thoder twelve a gowne & a hode redy made conteynyng thre yerdes of brode cloth euery yerd thereof to be of the value of thre shelynges & euery of the saide gownes to be lyned with blak frise & a scochyn to be made & set upon euery of the said gownes & a red rose crowned & embrodered thereupon of the price of xxd to be set on the left shulder of euery such gowne.<sup>120</sup>

Clothing was more often recorded in the wealthier almshouses. St Stephen's Westminster (1514) also mentions 'livery' for the almspeople, along with St James' Westminster (1449) and Lady Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse (1502), but it was also a requirement of more modest almshouses, such as Thomas Kneseworth's (1515) and David Smith's (Embroiderers') almshouse (1587).<sup>121</sup> The ubiquity of this type of clothing for almspeople is mentioned in the Mercers' Company court records. In 1609 the Tutor at Whittington's Almshouse was ordered to provide new gowns for the almsmen for Christmas, and it was agreed that:

...they shall henceforth have new gowns every third year at the like charge of the Company provided that they be enjoined not to go forth in cloaks but in gowns as other almsmen about the town do.<sup>122</sup>

From the fourteenth century these clothes marked almspeople as those who, like monks, nuns, and friars, lived in a form of holy poverty. They were of a modest colour, black, brown, or grey, like the habits worn by monks.<sup>123</sup> Anne Sutton records that gowns for priests and monks in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries were usually made from worsted cloth, a mixture of wool and linen or hemp, in a plain dark colour. This was a fabric reasonably priced, warm, and serviceable.<sup>124</sup> This modest dress was traditional for people in religious orders and members of the secular clergy. The synodal statutes of the diocese of Exeter in 1287 stated that modest dress and colours

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<sup>120</sup> BL, MS Harley 1498, fol. 42r.

<sup>121</sup> See Appendix One, pp. 316, 314, 307, 305, 295.

<sup>122</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 63.

<sup>123</sup> Brita Wood, 'Almshouse clothing', in Nigel Goose, H. C. Caffrey, Anne Langley eds., *The British Almshouse: New Perspectives on Philanthropy ca. 1400-1914* (Milton Keynes, 2016), p. 269.

<sup>124</sup> Anne F. Sutton, 'The Early Linen and Worsted Industries of Norfolk and the Evolution of the London Mercers' Company', *Norfolk Archaeology* 40 (1989), pp. 203, 217.

were required of the secular clergy because 'clerics are to be distinguished from lay people by their exterior habit, by which the interior is shown'.<sup>125</sup>

During the sixteenth century other colours were added to the almsfolk's colour palette, and the Goldsmiths' almsmen had two outfits of different colours, blue for everyday and black for special occasions. Herbert reports that an order of 1536 stipulated that the Goldsmiths' almsmen:

...shall ev'y Fryday cum in theyr blew gownes: and at eu'y obyte that the companye vse to gooto in the seconde livery, the same allmesmen to be in theyr blew: and at ey'y obyte that the companye vse togoo in thyr best lybery, the same allmesmen to be in theyr blake gownes.<sup>126</sup>

Before 1536 the regular livery of the almsmen was black gowns with a cape and two 'broaches' displaying the Goldsmiths' arms. The gowns and livery insignia were marks of honour, merit, good reputation, and poverty (sometimes honorary poverty), and public displays of distinction and liminality. At a time when it was common for the rich and powerful to provide livery for their servants and followers, the clothing of almspeople also identified which company provided charity for them. The provision of livery for almspeople embodied ideas about generous lordship, reinforcing the stratification of society through the concept of lordly generous gift-giving to the poor, who would return the gift with loyalty and prayer for the well-being of the lord and his family.

This practice did not die out with the Reformation. In 1612 Merchant Taylor Robert Dow left endowments to ensure that the almsmen he supported wore gowns embroidered with his emblem, a dove, and attended Church wearing the gowns on the feast day of St John the Baptist.<sup>127</sup> Steve Hindle wrote of 'badging the poor', referring to the practice of making the parish poor wear a badge on their left shoulders to mark that they were in receipt of parish relief, after the Poor Law of 1597.<sup>128</sup> Carole

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<sup>125</sup> *Councils and Synods*, II, I, pp. 1011-12.

<sup>126</sup> Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies*, 2 p. 215.

<sup>127</sup> Ian Archer, 'Arts and Acts of Memorialisation in Early Modern London', in J. F. Merritt ed., *Imagining Early Modern London: Perceptions and Portrayals of the City from Stow to Strype 1598-1700* (Cambridge, 2007), p. 106.

<sup>128</sup> S. Hindle, 'Dependency, Shame and Belonging: Badging the Deserving Poor, c.1550-1750', *Cultural and Social History*, 1.1 (2004), pp. 6-35.

Rawcliffe found that, in accordance to government legislation, tin badges were given to paupers in Norwich who had an official licence to beg as early as 1543.<sup>129</sup> Hindle examined the complex and sometimes contradictory messages that such symbols could give, the refusal of some people to wear such markers, and the administration of potentially harsh punishments for refusal. The seventeenth-century pauper badges were described as symbols of poverty; the transition from badges of honour to badges of shame had begun by the middle of the sixteenth century.<sup>130</sup>

Special clothing lent a level of theatricality and drama to civic religious occasions. André Vauchez developed the use of the term 'civic religion' in the early 1990s to refer to a 'collection of religious phenomena – cultic, devotional and institutional in which civil power plays a determining role, principally through the action of local and municipal authorities.'<sup>131</sup> Other meanings for the term civic religion, described by Andrew Brown include: 'the appropriation of values inherent in religious life by urban powers for the purposes of legitimation and celebration of public welfare'.<sup>132</sup> Originally the term civic religion was coined to describe the situation in Northern Italy where governments and rulers had enough power to seek to control areas that previously were the exclusive province of the Church, such as patronage of clergy, clerical institutions and the organisation of processions and control over saints, relics and cults. Brown, however, argued that the term is equally applicable to the situation in medieval Bruges and by extension therefore to medieval and Tudor London, and that civic religion developed in cooperation with ecclesiastical bodies, and so constituted a dynamic relationship designed to promote stability across a large urban area where the local loyalties of neighbourhood, parish and craft might work to promote 'sacred unity'.<sup>133</sup>

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<sup>129</sup> Carole Rawcliffe, ed., *The Norwich Chamberlains' Accounts 1539-40 to 1544-45* (Norwich, 2019), pp. 4, 205.

<sup>130</sup> Hindle, 'Dependency, Shame and Belonging', p. 10.

<sup>131</sup> A. Vauchez, 'Introduction', in A. Vauchez ed., *La Religion civique à l'époque médiévale et moderne (Chrétienté et Islam): Actes du colloque de Nanterre* (Rome, 1995), pp. 1-2; G. Chittolini, 'Civic Religion and the Countryside in Late Medieval Italy', in T. Dean and C. Wickham eds., *City and Countryside in Late Medieval and Renaissance Italy: Essays Presented to Philip Jones* (London, 1990), pp. 69-80.

<sup>132</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 15.

<sup>133</sup> Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 17.

Edwin Muir also advanced the idea that ritual processions in Venice were an expression of communal unity through communal acts.<sup>134</sup> Mervyn James theorised that the Corpus Christi processions, plays and feasts provided a perfect vehicle for resolving disputes, although some arguments appear to have been easier to resolve than others.<sup>135</sup> In terms of the common understanding of the urban state, the body politic, with each part being essential for the proper operation of the whole, this state of unity was sacred. Rawcliffe has suggested that civic processions constituted a 'model of how the elite believed the urban body *should* function'.<sup>136</sup> Civic religious processions and other activities were aimed at stimulating a sense of unity and wholeness, and reinforcing ideas about hierarchy, structure and the body politic.

Civic religion was on full display in the City of London in the form of processions to and from sites with religious meaning (some of which included almshouses), together with a Mass or sermon at either or both ends of the procession and attendant feasting.<sup>137</sup> The processions themselves, the order of precedence of the people involved in the processions, the places they passed, the starting and ending places and each participant gained meaning from their inclusion (or exclusion) from the ritual. The participants and the space they occupied and passed through became symbolic of something else. These symbols, as is their wont, changed meaning over time and in different contexts. At the very least these processions were a symbol of power, the power of the governing body to organise such an event and direct a body of people to participate.<sup>138</sup>

The poor were a visible and important part of parades in the mid-sixteenth century. Henry Machyn (1496/98-1563), a clothier in the City of London who kept a chronicle between 1550 and 1563, recorded the presence of poor people and almspeople at many processions through the city. In one example of this Machyn wrote:

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<sup>134</sup> Edward Muir, *Civic Ritual in Renaissance Venice*, (Princeton, 1981), pp. 280-281.

<sup>135</sup> Mervyn James, 'Ritual, Drama and the Social Body in the Late Medieval English Town', *Past & Present*, 98 1 (1983), p. 69; S. Beckwith, *Signifying God: Social Relation and Symbolic Act in the York Corpus Christi Plays* (Chicago, 2001), ch. 3. Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 95.

<sup>136</sup> Rawcliffe, *Urban Bodies*, p. 95.

<sup>137</sup> Andrew Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 19.

<sup>138</sup> Andrew Brown, *Civic Ceremony and Religion in Medieval Bruges*, p. 26.

The fifteenth day of May (1555) was a general procession from Paul's and unto Leadenhall and down Gracechurch Street and turned down Eastcheap and so to Paul's and again. Before went two hundred poor men with beads in their hands and three hundred poor women of every parish, two men and two women, two and two together. And after all the men, children of the hospital and after the children of St. Anthony's and then all the children of Paul's and all their masters and their ushers. And then all the priests and clerks and the bishop and my lord mayor and the aldermen and all the crafts of London in their livery.<sup>139</sup>

Here the men and children of the hospital of St Anthony were included in the procession. St Anthony of Vienne included both a school and an almshouse and had been rebuilt in 1499.<sup>140</sup> The children associated with the schools, hospitals and almshouses of London were frequently mentioned as being active participants in processions by Machyn. For example:

The ninth day of February (1557) a commandment came that all bishops, priests, and clerks should go a procession about London, and my lord mayor and the alderman and all the crafts in London in their livery to pray to God, and all the children of all schools and of the hospitals in order about London - called the general procession.<sup>141</sup>

There were few direct reports of the presence of the almspeople at the processions or religious services conducted at the charitable destinations of these processions. The lists of participants concentrate on the wealthy, and powerful. However, records for the Goldsmiths' Jubilee or 'London Triumph,' at the inauguration of Sir Robert Vyner as Mayor in 1674 listed the participants of the procession of the company which included pensioners of the company at the end of the procession:

Many poor men, pensioners, in green gowns, red sleeves and caps each of them employed in bearing of standards and banners, [and] diverse other pensioners, in green gowns, red sleeves and caps each of them carrying a javelin in the one hand and a target in the other, whereon is painted the coat-armour of their benefactors.<sup>142</sup>

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<sup>139</sup> Henry Machyn, *A London Provisioner's Chronicle, 1550-1563*, f. 45r.

<sup>140</sup> David Lewis, 'The Hospital of St Anthony of Vienne', in Barron and Davis, *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, pp. 228-231.

<sup>141</sup> Machyn, *Chronicle*, 1558 f. 87v.

<sup>142</sup> Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London*, 2 p. 221.

Other companies also included almspeople in their celebrations and pageants. The Drapers' Company included their almsmen in the festivities for the election of a new warden. The 'poor almsmen' of the company were listed as being seated in the hall at the midsummer feast of 1514.<sup>143</sup> The 1566 mayoral pageant of Sir Christopher Draper (Ironmongers' Company) included forty 'poor men of the Company', in cloth gowns of azure blue with red sleeves of Bruges satin.<sup>144</sup> Another pageant staged by the Ironmongers' in 1685 for the inauguration of Sir Robert Geoffrey commenced with sixty 'poor men of the Company' in gowns and caps with standards and banners to clear the way.

The age and infirmity of some of the almspeople of the company may have necessitated their absence from long processions through London. But as we have seen, almsmen could also be centre-stage in the religious ceremony at the end of the procession. Mervyn James, in his study of the Corpus Christi procession in Coventry in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, found that the procession was a vehicle for the honour and prestige of the company. He said:

By contributing its pageant to the cycle which was performed to 'the honour of God, and the honour and profit of this city' an occupation enhanced its own honour, and established its status as an active and valued member of the urban body, able to make a defined contribution to the latter's standing and well-being.<sup>145</sup>

James goes on to suggest that urban societies operated like landed aristocratic families in that they 'constructed communities of honour'. But whereas aristocrats derived their sense of honour from their lineage and heritage, urban societies looked to corporate character and the status of their guild, company or town for their sense of honour and this was ultimately derived from religion and the honour of God.<sup>146</sup>

Matthew Davies suggested that in the late-medieval and Tudor period the City companies were:

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<sup>143</sup> Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London*, 2 p. 470.

<sup>144</sup> Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London*, 2 p. 592.

<sup>145</sup> James, 'Ritual, Drama and the Social Body' p. 17.

<sup>146</sup> James, 'Ritual, Drama and the Social Body' p. 19.

...sufficiently self-confident and connected with the crown to be able to seek its patronage, but at the same time they were integral components of a proud, self-governing urban community.<sup>147</sup>

He described the City companies as confident in themselves and seeking to reinforce this with pageantry and symbolism. Carole Rawcliffe found that almshouses served 'to preserve both the public image of the guild and the internal cohesion of its spiritual and physical body'.<sup>148</sup> Caroline Barron also found a link between religion and honour among the urban elite of London. She looked at this issue from the point of view of chivalry and questioned why the urban elite of London did not take part in chivalric events like tournaments despite their familiarity with chivalric literature, mounting a watch to protect the City of London, and supporting the King with men and finance in time of war.<sup>149</sup> Barron also found that the elite of the City of London expressed their sense of chivalry and honour through religion, piety, and processions. She suggested that:

Londoners developed their own brand of chivalric spectacle which, while being influenced by chivalric tournaments and romances, yet had a distinct, possibly bourgeois character of its own.<sup>150</sup>

Barron suggested that this form of chivalric ritual was developed from the end of the fourteenth century. By the end of the fifteenth century these rituals were fully developed, mayors and aldermen were regularly knighted, chivalric literature was more popular (as demonstrated by increased evidence of possession of these stories), and that it could be said that the civic elite of London had fully joined the chivalric world of the aristocrats.<sup>151</sup>

The link between piety and charity and honour and chivalry among the urban guilds and companies goes a long way to explaining why so many companies put such a lot of effort and resources into maintaining almshouses, many to the present day. In this

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<sup>147</sup> Matthew Davies, 'Crown, City and Guild in Late Medieval London', in Matthew Davies and James A Galloway eds., *London and Beyond: Essays in honour of Derek Keene* (London, 2012), p. 267.

<sup>148</sup> Rawcliffe, 'Dives Redeemed?' p. 19.

<sup>149</sup> Barron, 'Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture in Medieval London', p. 223.

<sup>150</sup> Barron, 'Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture in Medieval London', p. 228.

<sup>151</sup> Barron, 'Chivalry, Pageantry and Merchant Culture in Medieval London', p. 240.

light the almshouses and almspeople themselves became symbols of the honour and integrity of the Companies of the City of London.

Almshouses were sited at the heart of the local community and almspeople were familiar actors in the daily theatre of life in the City of London and Westminster. They were a visible, solid, presence at funerals, obits, the daily round of religious services, and participants in the company's feasts, celebrations, and pageants. They provided a living sermon to the local population and their benefactors. The symbolism of their presence was often both contradictory and complex. Their ostensible purpose was to live quiet lives of prayer and study, dedicated to preparation for their own deaths and the relief of suffering in purgatory of their benefactors and local community. But they were also publicly visible on a daily basis, taking part in these prayers and acts of charity for the dead. They were potentially a role model for the worthy poor, but they were also a living advertisement for the almshouse founders and the organisations that managed their residences. They were a practical demonstration of their charity, chivalry, generosity, honour, modesty, piety, power, probity, and wealth on daily display in the parish Church.

## 7.4 Conclusion

As we have seen, the almshouses of late-medieval London were a visible, eloquent, and paradoxical part of the landscape of the city. Being at the same time both public and private, almshouses tried to balance a desire for pride and display, while also being an embodiment of the virtues of piety and humility. They were a public, visible part of the townscape, through their gates and buildings, but also private and secluded. The buildings were at the same time both luxurious and simple, obvious and hidden, a vehicle for both public display and private modesty, proud and humble.

The topography of these early almshouses speaks of their position at the heart of the City, of a growing confidence on the part of the civic elite to take control of a religious charitable institution and make it a symbol of their honour and chivalry as well as their piety and charity. The development of smaller specialised institutions, almshouses in the centre of the City, seems to be a feature of Northern European countries in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.



The built form of the almshouses reflected the urban elite's aspirations towards the religious life and monasticism. They were building their own version of a religious institution that was also domestic and practical. Despite the aspiration that almshouses would be semi-monastic institutions, the residents had a different relationship with the local community compared to traditional medieval hospitals. The practicalities of life and the limitations of endowments meant that almspeople were frequently present in the local community, rather than secluded. Purchasing their food and fuel from local businesses and often, despite the provision of a small pension, seeking to earn enough to keep themselves warm and fed.

Almspeople also maintained an active relationship with the community of the dead. Almshouses were liminal spaces, sometimes constructed contiguously with the parish graveyard, and almspeople were expected to spend long periods of the day in prayer and petition for the dead along with preparing for their own deaths. As part of their rule, late-medieval and Tudor almspeople were usually required to worship in the local parish church, and they were a vital part of the corporate representation at obits, funerals and religious services organised by founders and the company that administered the almshouse. Almshouses in the City of London and Westminster, particularly in the fifteenth century, tended to be founded by senior figures in the government of the City and (in Westminster at least) of the nation state. The liminal, separate, nature of the Augustinian-inspired almshouse community was therefore in direct contradiction with the desires of civic leaders to promote the almshouses and their residents as symbols of charity and piety that were directly connected to their own piety and goodness and that of the state and organisations they were part of. Through this duty, almspeople had to perform a difficult balancing act between being both visible and invisible to the local community, both active in the community and secluded and contemplative.

## Chapter Eight: Conclusion

This thesis has aimed to analyse and establish the characteristics of almshouses in the medieval and early-modern City of London and Westminster. Almshouses were important institutions, sitting figuratively and literally at the heart of the local community. At the beginning of this thesis I set out a number of questions about the nature of almshouses in the City of London and Westminster in this period. These were: what was the importance of Londoners' wealth, piety and mortality experience to the scale and pattern of almshouse foundation and support? How did almshouses function as an institution in London and what was their role in the late-medieval and Tudor context of spiritual and physical health? What was the social and charitable function of the almshouse for founders, residents and within the wider urban area? And, how did the development of almshouses in the City of London and Westminster compare to similar provision elsewhere in England and Europe?

Answering these questions in relation to almshouses between the foundation of the first recognisable almshouse, Elsyngspital in the City of London in 1330, and Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse, founded in Westminster in 1595, exposes many potential threads of enquiry, only some of which I have been able to pursue here.

I found a total of fifty-two almshouses within the specified time-frame (1330-1600). These almshouses were founded in a number of different ways, by religious organisations, by royalty, by City companies and by individuals. There may be a few more to identify, given that small almshouses founded by individuals can be ephemeral, often instituted during the life of the founder, and perhaps dissolved on their death, and thus often missing from the archives. Due to fragmentary archival records relating to the smaller less wealthy almshouses, and the wide diversity within the cohort, I have used evidence from across the whole sample for this thesis, rather than focussing on one or two individual institutions.

Due to the diversity of this newly-forming institution, it became apparent early on that I needed to establish a definition of an almshouse in order to be able to differentiate them from closely related contemporary institutions, including medieval hospitals, colleges and poor houses. Consequently, I defined an almshouse as an institution that:

... provided individual living accommodation for single people or couples within a physically defined community. The residents were usually elderly, infirm, and poor, but were capable of looking after themselves when they joined the almshouse. Residents often lived together for many years in charitable community. Almshouses were usually managed on a day-to-day basis by the residents themselves, or some form of warden, with administrative support from a board of governors or a City company.<sup>1</sup>

Using this definition, it became obvious that almshouses began to be formed in the City of London and Westminster in the first half of the fourteenth century. The exact date of foundation of many almshouses is hard to identify as a few evolved from traditional medieval hospitals, but most were informal institutions established before the date of the first archival evidence.

## 8.1 Londoners' Wealth, Piety and Mortality Experience and the Scale and Pattern of Almshouse Foundation and Support

Previous scholars have found that almshouses were formed from the decay of medieval hospitals.<sup>2</sup> Frank Rexroth theorised that almshouses were founded to provide privacy for householders to hide the shame they felt for their poverty.<sup>3</sup> Others have suggested that the dissolution of the chantries and other organisations during the Reformation or the reaction to the Black Death were prime factors.<sup>4</sup> Mortality experience, in terms of the death of a loved one, has also been mooted as causal in the development of almshouses.<sup>5</sup>

Instead of resulting from decay of medieval hospitals, as in other parts of the country, it would appear that almshouses in London and Westminster were usually the result of an active policy of development. Many traditional medieval hospitals built almshouse foundations in addition to their usual activities. Others made a positive, conscious, change to adapt their institutions to become almshouses. Almshouses were beginning to be founded in the City of London and probably Westminster too, before the advent

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<sup>1</sup> See Chapter One pp. 15-17.

<sup>2</sup> Orme and Webster, *The English Hospital*, pp. 136-138.

<sup>3</sup> Rexroth, *Deviance and Power*, p. 255.

<sup>4</sup> Clay, *Medieval Hospitals*, p. xix; Scarisbrick, *The Reformation and the English People*, p. 114; Phillips, 'Charitable Institutions', p. 293.

<sup>5</sup> Looijestijn, 'Funding and founding private Charities', p. 207; Goose and Looijestijn, 'Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic', pp. 1049-1073.

of the Black Death and two hundred years before the Dissolution.<sup>6</sup> Although almshouse foundation started before the Black Death the results of the overwhelming death rate from both the Black Death and subsequent epidemics resulted in changes to demography and patterns of poverty within the city meant that almshouses were a particularly apt response to the growing numbers of elderly people approaching the end of their lives without family support. However, almshouse building in response to the death of a loved one does not seem to have been a factor in the City of London and Westminster. Only one almshouse in this study out of fifty-two was expressly built in response to the death of a beloved son.<sup>7</sup>

The almshouses in this study were founded out of a profound sense of piety and charity on the part of the founder. This appears to be the case for all types of founder. Almshouses were usually lifetime foundations, rather than post-mortem. They were also often part of a larger work of charity that included educational provision, provision for prisoners, alms for the poor, and donations for work on the fabric of the City. Many of these charitable endeavours were integrated; they existed as part of a larger work of charity, rather than a discrete institution. Almshouses were often integrated with educational charities, both for the residents of the almshouse themselves and children or university scholars or clerics. What was universal among the founders was a sophisticated understanding of charity, both bodily and spiritual, and several founders lived with their almspeople in charitable community, spending their days praying and praising God. The founders of the almshouses that have left an imprint in the archives were wealthy. But almshouse foundation was not confined to the super-rich; many less affluent people contributed to the founding of almshouses through their membership of fraternities and City companies and guilds.

Other factors also encouraged the foundation of almshouses in the City of London and Westminster. The almshouses were not part of a civic programme for public well-being such as the development of hospitals in Florence or the Poor Tables in Bruges but were a personal response to local need. A few were founded for servants, but many were to be for the godly poor of a particular parish, often the parish where the founder

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<sup>6</sup> St James' Almshouse in Westminster may well have been a functioning almshouse before 1348.

<sup>7</sup> Sir Thomas Gresham's Almshouse: See Appendix One p. 318.

resided. Others were for members of City companies, who had fallen on hard times and were important to the founder. What seems to be central to the foundation of almshouses was that the social group targeted by the almshouse had personal meaning to the founder.

A sense of self also played a role in the foundation of almshouses. Increasing literacy and active religious agency of lay people in the later Middle Ages led to much greater understanding of the importance and role of charity. The founders were pious people, or people who wanted to appear pious. They set themselves the task to mirror Christ in the foundation of almshouses and other works of charity. Their piety and charity were markers of their superior social status, an urban version of chivalry, marking them out as the elite, the heads of the body politic.

Politics also played a role in the foundation of almshouses in the City of London. The dissatisfaction that resulted in several bills being put to Parliament for the reforming of traditional medieval hospitals, which were popularly thought to be corrupt and mismanaging the founder's bequest, coincided with the building of several early fifteenth-century almshouses.

The founders of almshouses influenced the genesis of the institution but the administrators determined its ongoing character and, crucially, its long-term survival. The longevity of the almshouse was especially important to the founders. They wanted their almshouse to continue as a living work of charity for the living and the dead in perpetuity. The creators of many almshouses in the City of London achieved this desire. A large part of this success was due to their choices about who was to administer the almshouse after their death. Within the City of London and Westminster four distinct types of almshouse administration can be identified: City companies, ecclesiastical, lay, and parish administration. Of these, the City companies were by far the most successful at ensuring the long-term survival of their almshouses. The almshouses run by ecclesiastical and parish administrators were mostly closed during the Dissolution. Many of the almshouses run by City companies continue in some form to the present day. Lay administration of almshouses by boards of trustees was a late development in the City of London and Westminster. The City companies

had proved themselves such able administrators that they continued to be the obvious choice throughout the period. By careful and accountable administration of resources and prolonged financial and emotional commitment to the institution the companies proved excellent custodians for almshouse institutions.

## 8.2 Almshouses as an Institution and their Function in the Late-Medieval and Tudor Context of Physical and Spiritual Health

The almshouse foundations of the City of London and Westminster were complex institutions, which sought to provide for the physical and spiritual health of founders, administrative organisations, and residents. Provision for physical and spiritual health was mediated by the contemporary understanding of the non-naturals, an understanding that was built into the physical fabric of the almshouse, and its relationship with external institutions, such as the parish church. Almshouses were places where one prepared for death but, as with the palliative care movement today, this did not mean a rapid decline. On the contrary, people who entered almshouses often lived for many years. The residents of almshouses entered into a charitable community, where they were both cared for and able to care for others.

Health and well-being were ensured by management of the non-naturals: air, food, and drink, waking and sleeping, fasting and fullness, exercise and rest, and careful management of the accidents of the soul (state of mind). The non-natural air was managed by the architecture of the building, close attention was paid to the provision of chimneys and windows. Almspeople were often protected from the foul vapours of a communal privy by *en-suite* provision. Food and drink were of both spiritual and bodily significance within the almshouse. The Eucharist meal of bread and wine, study of the word of God and prayer and praise provided spiritual nourishment and healing. Physical food provided bodily nourishment, and food was also used as medicine to balance the humours, and to engender a sense of community within the almshouse. Fasting and fullness were managed through adherence to the Church calendar of fasting and feast-days. Exercise and rest, and sleeping and waking, were managed through a regular routine, often in the form of a quasi-monastic rule which included attendance at Church, study, and prayer. The provision of individual chambers

facilitated these activities. Accidents of the soul were also managed through regular Church attendance, quiet and the provision of green spaces and gardens. Almspeople themselves were responsible for attending to each other both spiritually and physically. They were facilitators, of each other's health and spiritual peace and as such medical practitioners. Some almspeople also had access to outside medical practitioners such as barber-surgeons, private nursing, and the local hospitals, should they need more help than their fellow residents could provide. Almspeople had an important role to play within the community of the almshouse, the local community and the wider city community.

The spiritual journey entered into by residents of almshouses was a form of spiritual pilgrimage towards God, a pilgrimage of the soul. At a time when local pilgrimage was becoming less popular and more problematic, due in no small part to the fear of spreading disease and increasing anxiety about the burden the travelling poor might present to a community, almshouses enabled lay people to take an internal pilgrimage to heal their bodies and prepare their souls for death. This pilgrimage was facilitated by the provision of space and privacy to study and pray, religious guidance and counsel, and meeting basic bodily needs. Study and learning were a fundamental part of almshouse life. Almshouses were designed around the need for residents to spend time in study and private prayer and contemplation. As befits pilgrims, almshouses also enabled residents to have a measure of control over their lives. Although almshouses existed under the umbrella of an administrative organisation, the majority were self-managing on a day-to-day basis. Almshouses built by religious organisations tended to follow the practice of employing a master or warden to manage the almshouse but most lay foundations were managed by the almspeople themselves, sometimes led by a head almsman (occasionally called a tutor). There are few records of bad behaviour among early almshouse residents. It appears that the qualifications for a place as an almsperson - being poor, honest, and godly were reasonably effective at ensuring well-behaved candidates got a position in the almshouse. Behaviour that would warrant expulsion from the almshouse included things that would damage the reputation of the establishment, such as drunkenness. Other reasons for expulsion included coming into money. The exercise of charity in terms of the seven-physical

works of mercy and the seven-spiritual works of mercy was the bedrock of the almshouse and they were designed so that residents could be charitable themselves, as well as founders and administrative organisations. Consequently, almshouses provided a sophisticated integrated medical and spiritual environment, that enabled individuals to end their days with honour and comfort as they prepared for their physical death.

### 8.3 The Social and Charitable Function of the Almshouse for Founders', Residents, and the Wider Urban Area

As we have seen, almshouses played a fundamental role in both the founders' and the residents' lives, in terms of providing a vehicle through which they could be charitable to one another and prepare their souls for death. They gave pious people a mechanism through which, again as founders or residents, they could succour their loved ones, friends, colleagues, and neighbours in purgatory. For founders the almshouse demonstrated that they were not proud, avaricious, and uncaring like Dives, from the biblical story of Dives and Lazarus.<sup>8</sup> Building an almshouse was a demonstration of their knowledge, spiritual maturity and understanding, and a concrete example of their honour, chivalry, and social superiority. For residents, almshouses represented a respite from poverty (relative to their social peers), and opportunity to extend their spiritual knowledge and journey and also gave them a place of respect and honour within the local community.

Almshouses were founded for people from all social groups within the late-medieval and early-modern community. Some were founded for the parish poor, some for poor members of City companies, and others for people of wealthier backgrounds. They did not comprise a global plan to manage poverty, old age or disability within the City, rather they were an individual response to the founders' experience and understanding of those who were most in need and whose prayers they felt would be most effective: the honest, godly, poor.

The almshouses of late-medieval and Tudor London played an important role in the life of the City. In many ways this role was paradoxical, at once public and private, proud,

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<sup>8</sup> Luke 16:19-31.



and humble. The almshouses tried to balance a desire on the part of the administrators and the civic elite for display whilst being the embodiment of the virtues of piety and humility. Almspeople played a key role in the civic display of the city and so were often on show. In many ways the almshouses were an embodiment of the civic leaders' ideal of themselves. They wanted to be seen as pious and charitable and therefore godly, chivalrous leaders of noble birth. They used the almshouses to demonstrate their social superiority, knowledge, spiritual development, and self-worth. Almshouses were positioned at the heart of the local parish within the City of London and Westminster and their topography shows their importance to the City companies, parishes, and the civic elite. They demonstrated a growing confidence on the part of the City elite to take control of their religious charitable institution and use it as a symbol of both their honour and chivalry, as well as their piety and charity.

Despite the aspiration that almshouses would be semi-monastic, liminal, and therefore separate institutions, the residents had an active relationship with the local community. The practicalities of life and the limitations of endowments meant that almspeople were a frequent and visible presence in the local community. Almspeople also maintained an active charitable relationship with the community of the dead. Almspeople effectively lived in community with the dead, in buildings that were liminal spaces, sometimes built within the graveyard or on its boundary, contiguous with the precinct of the parish church. Despite the aim of the almshouses to foster an atmosphere of quiet prayer and contemplation, residents had to participate in the religious and ceremonial life of the city, as symbols of the honour and piety of the City Companies. The residents had to balance their practical need to interact with the local community for the necessities of life with the semi-monastic life of the almshouse, their own spiritual pilgrimage and their intimate spiritual relationship with the dead.

## 8.4 The Development of Almshouses in the City of London and Westminster, Compared to England and Europe

In order to set the almshouses of the City of London and Westminster in geographical context with the rest of England and Europe, I looked at the development of almshouse-type institutions within three other cities: Norwich in East Anglia, Bruges in Northern Europe and Florence in Southern Europe. This exercise was not

straightforward. The almshouses of Norfolk and Suffolk have been researched, but smaller institutions in Bruges and Florence in the medieval period have been neglected. However, it quickly became apparent that hospitals were becoming more specialised across the whole of Europe in a similar time-frame, but rather than following or copying a pattern demonstrated by other nation states, the form of the specialised institution was dictated by local needs, politics, culture and traditions. The foundation of almshouse-type institutions was quite different, even between relatively close geographical neighbours like London, Norwich, and Bruges. However, there were similarities in administration. City companies and guilds played a central part in the development of specialised hospitals in the large, mercantile cities of London, Bruges, and Florence, far more than in smaller cities like Norwich.

The most marked difference between the geographical areas focussed on their attitude to the residents of almshouses. All foundations were framed as works of charity, but the almshouse foundations of London demonstrated a much more personal understanding of the value and individuality of the residents. This may well be due to differences in the civic administration of the cities. In both Florence and Bruges, the guilds worked to provide charity across the whole city, whereas in London, and Westminster, provision was small and localised, based on the needs of individual social groups known to the founder.

## 8.5 Conclusion

Almshouses in the City of London and Westminster were, therefore, complex, multifaceted institutions, that often existed as part of a wider charitable foundation. They were closely related to institutions of learning, such as colleges and schools but also overlapped in function with the older medieval hospitals and foreshadowed the early-modern poor houses. They were sophisticated institutions that enabled residents to exercise some degree of autonomy and embark on their own spiritual pilgrimage in preparation for death. They were liminal spaces between the living and the dead and, as such, were a conduit through which the living could succour the dead in purgatory. Almshouses also played a fundamental role in the late-medieval and Tudor City, as a vehicle for the companies to demonstrate the image they wanted to project about themselves and the nature of the civic administration. Almshouses were an example of

the specialisation of hospitals taking place across Europe within this timeframe, and provided localised support for elderly, disabled and poor people, who fulfilled certain spiritual and financial criteria.

As is inevitable, in answering the questions framed by this thesis, several more have come to light. Medieval and Tudor almshouses have been revealed as sophisticated and complex works of charity that operated at many levels within the urban community. Future researchers will need to establish if this pattern was replicated in other parts of the country. How exactly did early parish almshouses influence later Poor Laws? At what point did hospitals begin to specialise within England as a whole? We need to find out more about the early foundation of almshouses in Northern Europe. Did they follow similar patterns and if not why? Research has been published from the early-modern period onwards, but their medieval foundations are little known. More work is needed on the diversity of provision of care for the elderly and disabled across Northern and Southern Europe. Was there wider institutional support for the elderly and disabled in Southern Europe? If so, what form did it take? If not how did the elderly and disabled without family support survive? There also needs to be more research into the small specialised late-medieval hospital-type institutions in Europe. Did specialisation happen everywhere in a similar time frame? and what were the factors that influenced the development of particular forms of small institution across the Continent? Almshouses have traditionally been considered small and unimportant, but instead they are complex, sophisticated, and a rich field for research.

# Appendix One: Gazetteer of Almshouses Founded in the City of London and Westminster 1330 – 1600

The purpose of this Gazetteer is to list the almshouses of the City of London and Westminster founded between 1330 and 1600, to place them in their geographical context (as far as possible), list their main features, and identify the archival and secondary sources relating to each, as a resource for future researchers.

Each entry in the Gazetteer follows the same format. Firstly, the name (or names) of the institution are given, followed by the founder's name (if known) and the secondary administrators of the almshouse following the founder's death (if appropriate). The location section details the position of the almshouse within the City of London or Westminster if known. It also records any images or pictures of the almshouse. The foundation dates (if known) are recorded. The residents' section details what is known about the identity of the residents of the almshouse. Likewise, the benefits' section lists any benefits the residents enjoyed, such as pension, rent payments, food, clothing and fuel. The built form section describes what is known about the structure of the almshouse institution and any changes to it within the period of the research. The sources section details the evidence I have found relating to the life of the almshouse and its founders, starting with primary sources and moving on to secondary. Source abbreviations are listed in the Key to the Gazetteer below.

Structuring the Gazetteer has presented a number of problems that need to be addressed. These include problems classifying institutions as an almshouse, establishing a single name for an institution, and accurately dating the foundation of the institution. I shall examine each of these issues in turn.

## Categorising Institutions as Almshouses

The first issue is how to categorise the enormous diversity of institutions that can be called almshouses during this period.<sup>1</sup> At the beginning of the period (1330), there was little consensus about what constituted an almshouse; consequently the term was

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<sup>1</sup> The issue of defining an almshouse institution is addressed in detail in Chapter One, pp. 17-18.

applied to a single house set up by a parish for the accommodation of the poor, a set of rooms above a guildhall gatehouse, an alley of dwellings, a hospital or a purpose-built elaborate institution, such as Whittington's Almshouse. This problem became a little easier to manage as time progressed; by the sixteenth century, there appears to have been formed a consensus about almshouse typology, perhaps best illustrated by John Stow's use of the epithet 'proper' applied to certain almshouses.<sup>2</sup> However, classification remains a perennial problem, as shown by a recent paper examining the geography of modern almshouses, which described them as a 'loose and baggy monster'.<sup>3</sup>

This diversity within the almshouse institution is complicated by a small group of older medieval hospitals, which evolved into almshouses (some partially) during this period. Deciding definitively at which point in time an institution ceased to be a hospital and became an almshouse is difficult. Several, such as St Katharine's Hospital and Westminster Abbey Almonry, ran an almshouse and a hospital concurrently on the same site. In all these cases I have tried to keep to the definition developed in Chapter One of this thesis: long-term individual residential accommodation, which enabled residents to live in charitable community with one another.<sup>4</sup>

## Naming Almshouses

Just as the early form of almshouses encompasses a wide range of institutions, so also the names of the almshouses took time to coalesce. The name of the almshouse was important in its role of memorialisation, imprinting the name and charity of the founders into the memory of the urban landscape. The desire of the rich and powerful to create a permanent memorial etched into the landscape is an ancient one. From the barrows of the Bronze Age to the burial mounds of the Anglo-Saxons and the elaborate tombs and built edifices of the Tudors, people have always tried to ensure they were not forgotten. The new almshouse institutions presented an opportunity to improve upon this desire. They gave the opportunity for founders' names to be forever marked on the urban landscape in association with a work of charity, a visual reminder in a

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<sup>2</sup> Stow, *Survey*, pp. 140, 159.

<sup>3</sup> John R. Bryson, Mark McGuinness, Robert G. Ford, 'Chasing a "loose and baggy monster": almshouses and the geography of charity', *Area* (2002), 34. 1 pp. 48-58.

<sup>4</sup> See Chapter One, pp. 17-18.

busy street of their piety and charity. John Stow glorified these acts of charity by recording each of these memorials, the tombs and the plaques, and especially the works of charity built into the fabric of the City, in his 1598 *Survey of London*. Stow spoke of the founders of these institutions (and others) as: '...deserving memory, for example to posterity shall be noted'.<sup>5</sup>

Almost every almshouse founded by an individual between 1330 and 1600 in the City of London and Westminster bore the name of the founder. Exceptions were the almshouse founded by James Fynch in 1509, which was given the name of 'Jesus Commons', and the last almshouse founded within the time-frame of this study. When Lady Anne Dacre founded her almshouse in 1595, she wished it to be called Emmanuel Hospital, but it was frequently referred to as Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse. The school she founded with the almshouse, and the only part of the charity to survive, is now known as Emmanuel School, but the road name in Westminster that commemorates the site of the original almshouse site is called Dacre Street.

Of the fifty-two almshouses in this study, fourteen had names that expressed their dedication to a saint or religious institution, thirty-six had names that included the name of the founder, one name related to its parish and one, Domus Conversorum, retained the name of the original institution. Forty of the fifty-two institutions in the study were originally called an almshouse. Lay almshouses displayed more flexibility with their names than those founded by religious organisations. Several changed their names over the course of their history, usually to the name of the guild or City company, who took on management of the organisation following the death of the founder. For example, David Smith's Almshouse became better known as the Embroiderers' Almshouse, the Countess of Kent's Almshouse became the Clothworkers' Almshouse and both Henry Barton's and Andrew Judd's almshouses became the Skinners' Almshouse. This change in name appears to have been gradual rather than imposed.

Some richer founders' almshouses retained their name, despite being managed by a City company. Richard Whittington's Almshouse is a good example of this. The

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<sup>5</sup> Stow, *Survey*, p. 114.

foundation documents for the almshouse suggest three different titles for the new institution:

Willing and ordyning that ye same house be called for evermore goddeshouse or Almsehous or the Hospitall of Richard Whittington and that the same Richard and Alice his wife be called and accompted of alle men for evermore verrey principalle founders of the same hous and hospital.<sup>6</sup>

Richard Whittington's executors suggest 'Godshouse', 'Almshouse' or the 'Hospital of Richard Whittington'. The exact format does not seem to be important to the executors; it is as if they were suggesting possible names, but were leaving the choice to posterity. What is important, however, is the eternal identification of Richard Whittington and his wife Alice as founders of the institution. In the fifteenth century, the institution seems to have been generally known as Whittington's Almshouse and, despite being managed by the Mercers, is still known as Whittington's Almshouse 600 years later.

The naming of almshouses was also subject to variation across time and region. In the Netherlands. Looijestijn records names including: 'gasthuis, kameren, godskameren, godshuis, weduwenhuis, provenhuis, aalmoeshuis and hofje'.<sup>7</sup> The names of almshouses in the City of London and Westminster did not have as many variations as the Dutch almshouses, but demonstrated some fluidity, especially in the fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries. The first institution that could be reasonably called an almshouse in the City of London, using the definition developed in Chapter One, was Elsyngspital. However, Elsyngspital was not its first name. Elsyngspital was dedicated to St Mary the Virgin by its founder William Elsyng in his will.<sup>8</sup> In the founding deeds, however, it is referred to as a Hospital in Honour of the Virgin Mary or the New Hospital within Cripplegate.<sup>9</sup> It is also referred to as the Hospital of St Mary the Virgin within Cripplegate, or 'the Hospital of the blessed Mary Aldermanbury', presumably to distinguish it from two other hospitals dedicated to the Virgin Mary in the City of

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<sup>6</sup> Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington*, p. 111.

<sup>7</sup> Goose and Looijestijn, 'Almshouses in England and the Dutch Republic', pp. 1049-1073.

<sup>8</sup> William Elsyng's will TNA, LR15/163.

<sup>9</sup> BL, CCv2 and LMA, HRS8/121; Bowtell, 'A Medieval London Hospital: Elsyngspital 1330 – 1536', p. 31.

London: St Mary without Bishopsgate and St Mary Bethlehem.<sup>10</sup> It was only after the death of William Elsyng that the hospital began to become known as Elsyng's Spital and eventually Elsyngspital.<sup>11</sup> As Ann Bowtell explained in her thesis on Elsyngspital, it is not clear if this popular renaming of the hospital was a pet name, which evolved as a result of affection for the institution, or a practical measure to discriminate between the other hospitals dedicated to St Mary.

## Foundation Dates

Identifying the name of an almshouse may be troublesome but identifying the foundation date of an institution is difficult indeed.<sup>12</sup> Apart from a few rich foundations, such as Whittington's Almshouse and Henry VII's Almshouse at Westminster, the best that can be said about the foundation date of many institutions is that they were founded before the date of the first record that mentions them. For some almshouses, such as a few examples found in wills, it is not possible to prove that they were built at all. Therefore, in addition to the foundation date, I have included the date of the first known mention of the institution in the records. I have also included the termination date of the institution where known.

This gazetteer represents a working summary of the almshouses in the City of London and Westminster between 1330 and 1600. It is hoped that future historians will be able to correct and update this list based on archival research.

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

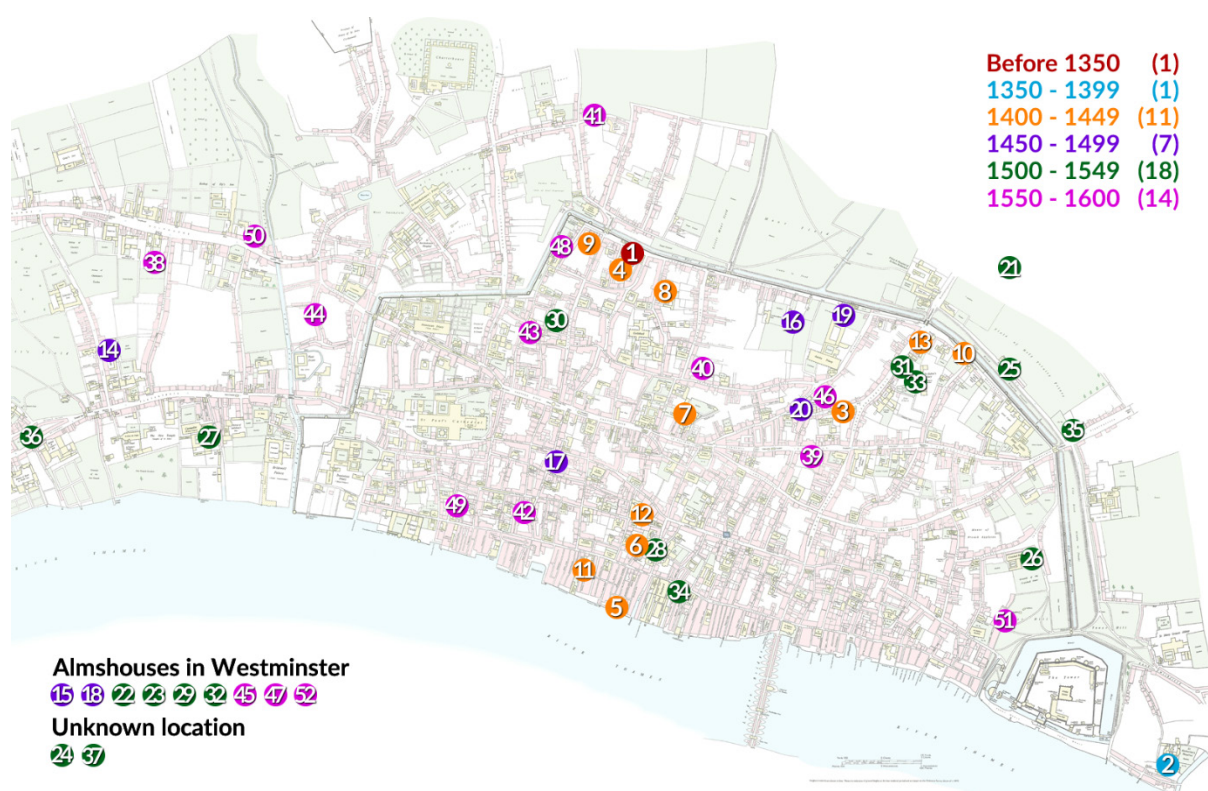
<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> See Chapter Three, pp. 81-3, for a more detailed discussion about the issues surrounding dating almshouses.



### Appendix 1 figure 3.1 Map of Almshouses in the City of London

A Map of Tudor London 1520, British Historic Towns Atlas



### Appendix 2 figure 1.2 Map of Almshouses in Westminster

W. Faithorne and R. Newcourt Map 1658 LMA



See index below to identify the almshouses on the maps above.

## *Index of Almshouses in the City of London and Westminster*

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. Elsyngspital                                   | 27. Countess of Kent's Almshouse (Clothworkers')             |
| 2. St Katharine's Hospital                        | 28. Jesus Commons  |
| 3. Merchant Taylors' Almshouse                    | 29. St Stephen's Westminster                                 |
| 4. Brewers' Almshouse                             | 30. Haberdashers' Almshouse                                  |
| 5. Whittington's Longhouse                        | 31. Andrew Judd's Almshouse (Skinners')                      |
| 6. Whittington's Almshouse                        | 32. Henry VIII's Almshouse (Watermens')                      |
| 7. Knolles' Almshouse (Grocers')                  | 33. John Hasilwood's Almshouse (Leathersellers')             |
| 8. Girdlers' Almshouse                            | 34. Robert Tyrwhitt's Almshouse (Dyers')                     |
| 9. Henry Barton's Almshouse (Skinners')           | 35. Anne Wether's Almshouse                                  |
| 10. St Augustine Papey                            | 36. St Clement Dane's Almshouse                              |
| 11. Vintners' Almshouse                           | 37. Kensington Parish Almshouse                              |
| 12. Cutlers' Almshouse                            | 38. Henry West's Almshouse (Dyers')                          |
| 13. Parish Clerks' Almshouse                      | 39. St Michael Cornhill Almshouse                            |
| 14. Domus Conversorum                             | 40. Dame Elizabeth Mory's Almshouse (Armourers')             |
| 15. St James' Westminster                         | 41. Lady Askew's Almshouse (Drapers')                        |
| 16. Carpenters' Almshouse                         | 42. Lewin's Almshouse (Ironmongers')                         |
| 17. Thomas Beaumont's Almshouse (Salters')        | 43. Sir Martin Bowes' Almshouse (Goldsmiths')                |
| 18. Guild of Our Lady of the Assumption Almshouse | 44. John Richmond's Almshouse (Armourers')                   |
| 19. Thomas Cook's Almshouse                       | 45. Westminster School Almshouse                             |
| 20. St Anthony of Vienne                          | 46. Sir Thomas Gresham's Almshouse (Mercers'/City of London) |
| 21. St Mary Spital without Bishopsgate Almshouse  | 47. Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouse                            |
| 22. Henry VII's Almshouse                         | 48. Sir Ambrose Nicholas' Almshouse (Salters')               |
| 23. Lady Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse            | 49. David Smith's Almshouse (Embroiderers')                  |
| 24. Kneseworth's Almshouse (Fishmongers')         | 50. Galliard Almshouse                                       |
| 25. Holy Trinity Almshouse                        | 51. Richard Hill's Almshouse (Merchant Taylor Hills)         |
| 26. Milbourne's Almshouse (Drapers')              | 52. Emmanuel Hospital (Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse)          |

## Key to Gazetteer

### Fields

- a. Map Index Number
- b. Founder
- c. Ongoing Administration
- d. Almshouse Location
- e. Foundation Date
- f. First Documentary Evidence
- g. Last date known to have been active or termination date
- h. Residents
- i. Benefits
- j. Built Form
- k. Sources

## Built Form

- A. One building with residents occupying single rooms, with some communal areas within a precinct.
- B. A building with separate rooms for residents but no precinct.
- C. Separate almshouses with their own front door arranged together within a precinct. These include quadrant-shaped developments and alleys.
- D. A row of houses with their own front door, but no precinct.
- E. Almshouses or separate rooms within or attached to a guildhall precinct.
- F. Chambers or groups of small houses built within a Churchyard.
- G. Unknown.

## Source Abbreviations

<b>BL</b>	British Library
<b>CCA</b>	The Clothworkers' Company Archive
<b><i>Endowed Charities</i></b>	Charity Commissioners of Great Britain, <i>The Endowed charities of the City of London: reprinted at large from seventeen reports of the Commissioners for Inquiring Concerning Charities</i> (London, 1829)
<b><i>Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting</i></b>	<i>Calendar of Wills Proved and Enrolled in the Court of Husting, AD 1258-1688</i> , ed., R. R. Sharpe, 2 vols (London, 1890)
<b>GL</b>	Guildhall Library, London
<b>Stow, Survey</b>	John Stow, <i>A Survey of London</i> (Stroud, 2009)
<b>LMA</b>	London Metropolitan Archives
<b>TNA</b>	The National Archives
<b>WAM</b>	Westminster Abbey Muniments
<b>Jordan, Charities</b>	W. K. Jordan, <i>The Charities of London 1480-1660</i> (London, 1960)

## List of Almshouses

### Andrew Judd's Almshouse (Skinners')

- a. Map Index Number: 31 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Andrew Judd
- c. Ongoing Administration: Skinners' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Near the Parish Church of St Helen in Bishopsgate Street
- e. Foundation Date: Around 1544
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1550
- g. Last date active: Amalgamated with other Skinners' Almshouse charities, still operational
- h. Residents: 6 poor people
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, fuel
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:
  - TNA PROB 11/42A/ 493
  - Stow, *Survey*, p. 161.
  - Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting*, II, p. 668.
  - Endowed Charities*, p. 423.

### Anne Wether's Almshouse

- a. Map Index Number: 35 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Anne Wether
- c. Ongoing Administration: Executors
- d. Almshouse Location: Aldgate Street
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1547
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1547
- g. Last date active: 1547
- h. Residents: 5 women
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: D

k. Sources:

TNA PROB 11/31/716

*Abstracts of Inquisitiones Post Mortem For the City of London: Part 3*, ed. E.

A. Fry (London, 1908), p. 100.

Jordan, *Charities*, p. 140.

### **Brewers' Almshouse**

a. Map Index Number: 4 City of London Map

b. Founder: Brewers' Company

c. Ongoing Administration: Brewers' Company

d. Almshouse Location: Brewers' Hall, Adelstreet

e. Foundation Date: 1422/3

f. First Documentary Evidence: 1422

g. Last date active: no documentary evidence after 1440

h. Residents: Men and women of the Brewers' Company – five rooms

i. Benefits: Rent, Pension, Burial

j. Built Form: E

k. Sources:

GL CLC/L/BF/A/021/MS05440

*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting II*, pp. 665-668.

Caroline Metcalfe, 'William Porlond clerk to the Craft and Fraternity of the Brewers' of London', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 64 (2013), p. 267-284.

Caroline Metcalfe, 'William Porlond, clerk (d. 1440) and the Brewers' Company of London: A Study of Guildhall Library Manuscript 5440', (unpublished master's thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2012)

### **Carpenters' Almshouse**

a. Map Index Number: 16 City of London Map

b. Founder: Carpenters' Company

c. Ongoing Administration: Carpenters' Company

d. Almshouse Location: Carpenters' Hall, Throgmorton Street

- e. Foundation Date: Before 1458
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1458
- g. Last date active: 1493
- h. Residents: Widows
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, burial
- j. Built Form: E
- k. Sources:  
 GL CLC/L/CC/D/002/MS04326/001  
*Records of the Worshipful Company of Carpenters. Vol. 2 Wardens' Account Book 1438-1516*, ed. Bower Marsh (Oxford, 1914), pp. 27, 310.

### **Cornelius Van Dun's Almshouses**

- a. Map Index Number: 47 Westminster map
- b. Founder: Cornelius Van Dun (Van Donne)
- c. Ongoing Administration: Parish
- d. Almshouse Location: Petty France, Westminster – 8 Almshouses and St Ermin's Hill, Westminster - 12 Almshouses
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1577
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1577
- g. Last date active: 1850
- h. Residents: 20 poor widows of the Parish of St Margaret's Westminster
- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:  
 Stow, *Survey*, p. 394.  
 Jordan, *Charities*, pp. 143, 144, 356.  
*Endowed Charities*, p. 274.

### **Countess of Kent's Almshouse (Clothworkers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 27 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Lady Margaret Countess of Kent
- c. Ongoing Administration: Clothworkers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Whitefriars, Fleet Street

- e. Foundation Date: 1537
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1538
- g. Last date active: Moved to Islington in 1770, remained active until the nineteenth century
- h. Residents: 7 poor women
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:
  - CCA CL/G/Charity/Kent/A/1
  - CCA CL/Estate/5/1A/5
  - CCA CL/G/MSS/Angell/5/21/23
  - Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting*, II pp. 624-625.
  - TNA PROB 11/28/347
  - Endowed Charities*, pp. 179-181.
  - J. Schofield, *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell* (London, 1987), pp. 74-7, 129-30.
  - Nick Holder, 'The Medieval Friaries of London: A topographic and archaeological history, before and after the Dissolution', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2011)
  - Jordan, *Charities*, p. 138.

### **Cutlers' Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 12 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Cutlers' Company
- c. Ongoing Administration: Cutlers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Possibly next to or within the Cutlers' Hall, Horseshoe Bridge Street
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1449
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1449
- g. Last date active: End fifteenth century
- h. Residents: Poor members of the Cutlers' Company
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension

- j. Built Form: E
- k. Sources:
  - LMA MS CLC/L/CL/D/001/ 07146/008
  - LMA MS CLC/L/CL/D/001/ 07146/004
  - LMA MS CLC/L/CL/D/001/ 07146/009
  - LMA MS CLC/L/CL/D/001/ 07146/022
  - Machi Sasai, 'The Cutlers' Craft in Fifteenth-Century London: Corporate and Personal Charity', (unpublished master's thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2009)
  - Machi Sasai, 'Corporate Charity of London Cutlers' in the Fifteenth Century', *The Haskins Society Journal Japan*, 5 (2013) pp. 15-26.
  - Charles Welch, *History of the Cutlers' Company of London: And of the Minor Cutlery Crafte: With Biographical Notices of Early London Cutlers'*, (London, 1916)

### **Dame Elizabeth Mory's Almshouse (Armourers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 40 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Dame Elizabeth Mory
- c. Ongoing Administration: Armourers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Love-Alley, Love Lane in the parish of St Olave Jewry
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1551
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1551
- g. Last date active: 1808
- h. Residents: 13 poor, honest persons
- i. Benefits: Rent
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:
  - Endowed Charities*, pp. 311-313.

### **David Smith's Almshouse (Embroiderers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 49 City of London Map
- b. Founder: David Smith
- c. Ongoing Administration: Embroiderers' Company



- d. Almshouse Location: West side of Peter's Hill (Peter's Lane), Castle Baynard Ward
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1587
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1587
- g. Last date active: 1863
- h. Residents: 6 poor widows aged at least 56 who had been resident in the parish of St Peter, Paul's Wharf or Castle Baynard Ward for at least 20 years
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:  
TNA PROB 11/71/127  
LMA MS 12805- 13997, 22510- 794, 35934  
Stow, *Survey*, p. 311.  
J. Schofield, *The London Surveys of Ralph Treswell* (London, 1987), p. 108.  
Jordan, *Charities*, pp. 127, 142.

### **Domus Conversorum**

- a. Map Index Number: 14 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Henry III
- c. Ongoing Administration: Master of the Rolls
- d. Almshouse Location: Chancery Lane
- e. Foundation Date: 1232 – appears to have become an almshouse in the fifteenth century
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1232
- g. Last date active: 1609
- h. Residents: Initially 98 converts from Judaism to Christianity, by the fifteenth century there were 8 residents
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:  
BL MS Royal 14 C VII, fol. 121r

Stow, *Survey*, p. 331.

Michael Abler, *The History of the Domus Conversorum from 1290 to 1891* (Edinburgh, 1899)

Lauren Fogle, 'The Domus Conversorum: the personal interest of Henry III', *Jewish Historical Studies* 41 (2007), pp. 1-7.

### **Elsyngspital**

- a. Map Index Number: 1 City of London Map
- b. Founder: William Elsyng
- c. Ongoing Administration: Canons Regular
- d. Almshouse Location: Fronting Phillip Lane and Gayspor Lane near Cripplegate
- e. Foundation Date: 1330
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1330
- g. Last date active: 1536
- h. Residents: 32, men and women
- i. Benefits: Rent, bed and bedding, some food, services of a barber surgeon
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:

*Calendar of Patent Rolls preserved in the Public Record Office 1330-1334* (London, 1891-1916), p. 49.

TNA LR15/163

LMA MS DL/C/B/003/MS09171/004, folio 40

Anne Bowtell, 'A Medieval London Hospital: Elsyngspital 1330 – 1536', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2010)

*The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, Caroline Barron and Matthew Davies eds., (London, 2007), p. 165.

### **Emmanuel Hospital (Lady Anne Dacre's Almshouse)**

- a. Map Index Number: 52 Westminster Map
- b. Founder: Lady Anne Dacre
- c. Ongoing Administration: Trust

- d. Almshouse Location: Tuthill Fields, Westminster
- e. Foundation Date: 1595
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1593
- g. Last date active: Unknown, closed after 1890, now only the school remains
- h. Residents: 10 poor and aged men and 10 poor and aged women and 20 poor children from the City of Westminster and the Parishes of Chelsea and Hayes in Middlesex
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, nursing
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:
  - LMA MS CLA/071/AD 01 -03
  - LMA MS CLA/071/PS
  - LMA MS CLA/071/EM
  - TNA PROB 11/86/47
  - BL MS Lansdowne 74/39
  - Charity Commissioners, *Parochial Charities of Westminster*, (London, 1890) pp. 61-67.
  - Stow, *Survey*, p. 394.
  - Jordan, *Charities*, p. 145.

### **Galliard's Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 50 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Richard Galliard of Islington
- c. Ongoing Administration: Unknown
- d. Almshouse Location: Gold lane (or Golding lane), Cripplegate Ward
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1598
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1598
- g. Last date active: 1598
- h. Residents: 13 Poor people
- i. Benefits: Rent, fuel
- j. Built Form: D

- k. Sources:  
Stow, *Survey*, p. 261.

### **Girdlers' Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 8 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Girdlers' Company
- c. Ongoing Administration: Girdlers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Girdlers' Company Hall, Basinghall Street
- e. Foundation Date: 1431
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1431
- g. Last date active: Possibly destroyed in the 1666 fire
- h. Residents: Two poor people of the Girdlers' Company
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: E
- k. Sources:  
*Endowed Charities*, p. 222.  
*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting II* p. 493.

### **Guild of Our Lady of Assumption Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 18 Westminster Map
- b. Founder: Guild of Our Lady of Assumption
- c. Ongoing Administration: Guild of Our Lady of Assumption
- d. Almshouse Location: Our Lady's Alley, King Street, Westminster
- e. Foundation Date: Between 1431 and 1474
- f. First Documentary Evidence: Premises 1431, almshouse 1474
- g. Last date active: 1568
- h. Residents: Four poor people, male and female, of the parish
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:  
TNA E301/88  
Gervase Rosser, *Medieval Westminster 1200 – 1540* (Oxford, 2001), pp. 320-1.

A. G. Rosser, 'The Essence of Medieval Urban Communities: The Vill of Westminster 1200-1540', *Transactions of the Royal Historical Society* 34 (1984) pp. 107-109.

### **Haberdashers' Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 30 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Thomas Huntlow (possibly)
- c. Ongoing Administration: Haberdashers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Staining Lane
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1543
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1543
- g. Last date active: Destroyed in Great Fire of London 1666
- h. Residents: 10 poor people
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, food
- j. Built Form: E
- k. Sources:  
Stow, *Survey*, p. 263.  
*Endowed Charities*, pp. 475-476.

### **Henry VII's Almshouse Westminster**

- a. Map Index Number: 22 Westminster Map
- b. Founder: Henry VII
- c. Ongoing Administration: Westminster Abbey
- d. Almshouse Location: Westminster Abbey
- e. Foundation Date: 1502
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1502
- g. Last date active: Almshouses demolished 1779, foundation continued to the twentieth century
- h. Residents: 13 almsmen, 3 almswomen
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, food, fuel, clothing, bedding and drapery
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:  
BL MS Harley 1498

Stow, *Survey*, p. 393.

Christine Fox, 'The Royal Almshouse at Westminster c.1500-c.1600'

(unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College 2012)

### **Henry VIII's Almshouse (Watermens)**

- a. Map Index Number: 32 Westminster Map
- b. Founder: Henry VIII
- c. Ongoing Administration: Watermen and Lightermen's Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Woolstaple, Westminster
- e. Foundation Date: 1544
- f. First Documentary Evidence: Unknown
- g. Last date active: 1830
- h. Residents: 7 men
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: G
- k. Sources:

Jordan, *Charities*, pp. 140-141.

*Endowed Charities*, p. 272.

Henry Humphreus, *A comprehensive history of the Company of Watermen and Lightermen, 1514 to 1920*, 1 (1887), p. 89.

### **Henry Barton's Almshouse (Barton's Alley and Skinners' Almshouse)**

- a. Map Index Number: 9 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Henry Barton
- c. Ongoing Administration: Skinners' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Alley off Woodstreet next to the Red Lion Tavern
- e. Foundation Date: 1434
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1434
- g. Last date active: Following the Great Fire of London 1666, the alley was rebuilt as tenements
- h. Residents: 7 poor people
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension

- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:
  - TNA PROB 11/3/353
  - GL MS 30836 Calendar, 5, pp. 141-168.
  - GL MS 30727/1-3,
  - GL MS 30817-19,
  - GL MS 30995
  - GL Corpus Christi Book (Skinners')
  - Stow, *Survey*, p. 299.
  - Endowed Charities*, p. 436.
  - J.F. Wadmore, 'Some Account of the History and Antiquities of the Worshipful Company of Skinners' London', *London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 5 (1881), pp. 92-182.

### **Henry West's Almshouse (Dyers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 38 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Henry West
- c. Ongoing Administration: Dyers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Near Barnard's Inn in the parish of St Andrew, Holborn
- e. Foundation Date: 1550
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1829
- g. Last date active: Dyers' Almshouse charity amalgamated and still active, almshouses in Crawley and Leeds
- h. Residents: 8 poor people
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, fuel
- j. Built Form: G
- k. Sources:
  - Endowed Charities*, pp. 215-216.

### **Holy Trinity**

- a. Map Index Number: 25 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Prior of Holy Trinity

- c. Ongoing Administration: Holy Trinity Priory
- d. Almshouse Location: Near Houndsditch, Portsoken Ward
- e. Foundation Date: Unknown – probably between 1503 and 1547
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1598
- g. Last date active: Unknown
- h. Residents: Unknown
- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:  
Stow, *Survey*, p. 124.

### **Jesus Commons (Shearmen's Almshouse)**

- a. Map Index Number: 28 City of London Map
- b. Founder: James Fynch
- c. Ongoing Administration: Shearmen's Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Dowgate Street, Parish St John Walbrook
- e. Foundation Date: 1507
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1508
- g. Last date active: 1579
- h. Residents: Priests, number not specified
- i. Benefits: Rent, Library, Food, Laundry
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:  
TNA PROB 11/16/461  
CCA MS CL/B/1/2, fols. 18r-18v, 130v, 149v, 169v, 180v-181r, 193v-194r, 197r, 201v, 215v-216r, 223r  
CCA MS Renter Warden Accounts, CL/D/5/3, Section 40, fols. 3r, 7r,  
Stow, *Survey*, p. 206.  
*The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, Caroline Barron and Matthew Davies eds. (London, 2007), p. 190.  
Catherine Jamison, 'Notes on Jesus Commons', *Notes and Queries*, 173 (1937), pp. 92-3.



Matthew Davies, *People, Property and Charity: The Clothworkers' Company, 1500-1688* (2010):  
<<http://www.clothworkersproperty.org/properties/jesus-commons>>  
[accessed 30 March 2020]

### **John Hasilwood's Almshouse (Leathersellers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 33 City of London Map
- b. Founder: John Hasilwood
- c. Ongoing Administration: Leathersellers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Little St Helens
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1544
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1544
- g. Last date active: Building pulled down 1780, almshouses rebuilt in another location and remain active
- h. Residents: 4 men and 3 women from the Leathersellers Company
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, fuel
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:  
Stow, *Survey*, p.159.  
*Endowed Charities*, pp.527-528.  
Jordan, *Charities*, p. 139.

### **John Richmond's Almshouse (Armourers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 44 City of London Map
- b. Founder: John Richmond
- c. Ongoing Administration: Armourers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Christopher Alley (off Seacoal Lane)
- e. Foundation Date: 1559
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1559
- g. Last date active: Amalgamated into the Armourers' almshouse charities, operational until the nineteenth century.
- h. Residents: 10 poor people of the Armourers' Company
- i. Benefits: Rent

- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:  
*Endowed Charities*, p. 314.

### **Kensington Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 37 Not on Map
- b. Founder: Unknown
- c. Ongoing Administration: Parish
- d. Almshouse Location: Unknown
- e. Foundation Date: Unknown
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1548
- g. Last date active: 1548
- h. Residents: Poor people number unknown
- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: G
- k. Sources:  
*London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, ed, C. J. Kitching, London Record Society 16 (1980), 154.

### **Kneseworth's Almshouses (Fishmongers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 24 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Thomas Kneseworth
- c. Ongoing Administration: Fishmongers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Unknown
- e. Foundation Date: 1515
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1515
- g. Last date active: Unknown
- h. Residents: 13 poor people
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, clothes
- j. Built Form: G
- k. Sources:  
TNA PROB 11/17/410(1)  
*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting II*, p. 619.

*London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, ed, C. J. Kitching, London Record Society 16 (1980), 209

Stow, *Survey*, p.161,240, 325.

*Endowed Charities*, pp. 560-566.

Jordan, *Charities*, pp. 137, 256, 352.

### **Knolles' Almshouse (Grocers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 7 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Thomas Knolles
- c. Ongoing Administration: Grocers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Grocers' Hall, Coneyhope Lane
- e. Foundation Date: 1429
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1429
- g. Last date active: 1544 - probably continued until the fire of 1666
- h. Residents: Twelve poor men
- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: E
- k. Sources:
 

*Grocers' Company Facsimile of Ms Records 1345 – 1463* ed. John Abernethy Kingdon, 1 (London 1886)

*The Register of Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury 1414-1443, vol.2*, E.F. Jacob ed., Canterbury and York Society, 42 (1937), pp. 519-26, 564-68, 615-20.

*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting II*, p. 474.

Stow, *Survey*, pp. 110, 232.

### **Lady Askew's Almshouse (Drapers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 41 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Lady Emma Askew
- c. Ongoing Administration: Drapers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: North side of Beech Lane outside Cripplegate
- e. Foundation Date: Disputed, before 1553
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1553

- g. Last date active: On original site until 1884, now amalgamated into Drapers' almshouse charity
- h. Residents: Seven poor widows of good name and honest conversation
- i. Benefits: Rent and pension
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:
 

TNA PROB 11/37/124

Stow, *Survey*, p. 302.

Jordan, *Charities*, pp. 140, 353-4.

J.J. Baddeley, *Cripplegate: One of the Twenty-Six Wards of the City of London* (London, 1922), p. 232.

*City of London Livery Companies Commission Report*, 4 (London, 1884), p. 120.

### **Lady Margaret Beaufort's Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 23 Westminster Map
- b. Founder: Lady Margaret Beaufort
- c. Ongoing Administration: Westminster Abbey
- d. Almshouse Location: Westminster Abbey Almonry
- e. Foundation Date: 1502
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1502
- g. Last date active: Between 1541 and 1598
- h. Residents: Disputed – probably 9 men
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, clothes, food
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:
 

*Calendar of Close Rolls Henry VII*, ed. R A Latham, ii (1500 – 1509), 770, p. 291.

WAM MS 19113

WAM MS 19048

WAM MS 19112

WAM MS 23712, 23714, 23716

Stow, *Survey*, pp. 393-4.

Christine Fox, 'The Royal Almshouse at Westminster c.1500-c.1600'

(unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College 2012) p. 129.

Barbara Harvey, *Living and Dying in England 1100-1540: The Monastic Experience* (Oxford, 1996)

G. Rosser, *Medieval Westminster 1200 – 1540* (Oxford, 1989)

Neil Rushton, 'Spatial Aspects of the Almonry Site and the Changing Priorities of Poor Relief at Westminster Abbey c.1290-1540'', *Architectural History*, 45 (2002), pp. 66-91.

### **Lewin's Almshouse (Ironmongers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 42 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Thomas Lewin and his wife Agnes
- c. Ongoing Administration: Ironmongers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Churchyard of St Nicholas Olave in Queenhithe ward
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1555
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1555
- g. Last date active: Burnt in fire of 1666 and rebuilt in parish of St Luke Old Street, burnt again 1785 and replaced, now amalgamated with other Ironmongers' Almshouse charities
- h. Residents: 4 poor people
- i. Benefits: Rent and pension
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:

GL MS 17065, 17074-5, 17250

*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting II*, pp. 665-668.

Stow, *Survey*, p. 302.

*Endowed Charities*, p. 518.

William Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London* 1 (1838), pp. 601, 606.

## Merchant Taylors' Almshouse

- a. Map Index Number: 3 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Merchant Taylors' Company
- c. Ongoing Administration: Merchant Taylors' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Bradstreet between the Merchant Taylors' Hall and St Martin Outwich
- e. Foundation Date: 1413
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1413
- g. Last date active: Still operational as part of the Merchant Taylors charities – different location
- h. Residents: Seven almsmen and their wives
- i. Benefits: Rent, Pension and Fuel
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:

GL MS London, Merchant Taylors' Company Accounts, I, 2, 3.

GL CLC/L/MD/D MS 34048/1

GL CLC/L/MD/D MS 34048/2

*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting* II, pp. 525-526.

GL MS. 9171/3, f.381v

Stow, *Survey*, p. 166.

*The Merchant Taylors' Company of London: Court Minutes, 1486 – 1493*,  
ed. Matthew Davies (Stamford, 2000)

Matthew Davies, 'Artisans, Guilds and Government in London', *Daily Life in the Late Middle Ages*, ed. R.H. Britnell, (Stroud, 1998), pp. 125-150.

Matthew Davies, 'The Tailors of London: Corporate Charity in the late-medieval town', in *Crown, Government and People in the Fifteenth Century*, ed. R.E. Archer, (Stroud, 1995), pp.161-190.

Matthew Davies, 'The Tailors of London and their Guild, c 1300-1500'  
(unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Oxford, 1994)

## Milbourne's Almshouses (Drapers')

- a. Map Index Number: 26 City of London Map

- b. Founder: Sir John Milbourne
- c. Ongoing Administration: Drapers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Woodroffe Lane
- e. Foundation Date: 1534
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1534
- g. Last date active: Amalgamated into Drapers' almshouse charities – still operational
- h. Residents: 14 poor men and their wives
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:  
 Drapers' Company Archive, MS A VII 48  
 Jordan, *Charities*, pp. 111, 140.  
 Thomas Milbourn, 'The Milbourne Alms-Houses, And A Brief Account of The Founder and His Family', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society* 3 2 (1867) pp. 139 -152.

### **Parish Clerks' Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 13 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Parish Clerks' Company
- c. Ongoing Administration: Parish Clerks' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Bishopsgate Street, near the Angel Inn
- e. Foundation Date: 1448
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1598
- g. Last date active: After 1598
- h. Residents: 7 poor members of Parish Clerks' Company and their wives
- i. Benefits: Rent, Pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:  
 Stow, *Survey*, pp. 158-9, 239.  
*Endowed Charities*, p. 289.  
 Christie James, *Some Account of Parish Clerks, More Especially of the*

*Ancient Fraternity of St. Nicholas: Now Known as the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks* (London, 1893)

P. H. Ditchfield, *The Parish Clerk* (London, 1907)

Reginald. H. Adams, *The Parish Clerks of London. A history of the Worshipful Company of Parish Clerks of London* (London, 1971)

### **Richard Hills' Almshouse (Merchant Taylors' Hills')**

- a. Map Index Number: 51 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Richard Hills
- c. Ongoing Administration: Merchant Taylors' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Tower Hill, north side of Rosemary Lane (now Royal Mint Street)
- e. Foundation Date: 1587
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1587
- g. Last date active: Still active, amalgamated with other Merchant Taylors' almshouse charities
- h. Residents: 13 widows of deceased almsmen of the company of Merchant Taylors'
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, fuel
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:
  - LMA MS 34100/147 151, 160-1, 163
  - L.M.A.MS 34101/29
  - LMA MS 34214/2, 19
  - LMA MS 34216-23
  - Stow, *Survey*, pp. 112, 122.
  - Jordan, *Charities*, pp. 144, 356.

### **Robert Tyrwhitt's Almshouse (Dyers')**

- a. Map Index Number: 34 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Robert Tyrwhitt
- c. Ongoing Administration: Dyers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: All Hallows the Less, Thames Street



- e. Foundation Date: Before 1545
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1545
- g. Last date active: Amalgamated with other Dyers' almshouses – still active
- h. Residents: 4 men, 3 women
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, fuel
- j. Built Form: G
- k. Sources:  
*Endowed Charities*, pp. 215-216.  
*Jordan, Charities*, p. 140.  
 E. C. Robbins, 'History and Antiquities of the Dyers' Company', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 5 (1881), p. 455.

### **St Anthony of Vienne**

- a. Map Index Number: 20 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Brothers of St Anthony and John Tate
- c. Ongoing Administration: Brothers of St Anthony
- d. Almshouse Location: Parish of St Benet Fink, near St Martin's Ostewich
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1499
- f. First Documentary Evidence: St Anthony accounts mention poor men but unclear when it became an almshouse
- g. Last date active: 1565
- h. Residents: 12 poor men
- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: G
- k. Sources:  
 St George's Chapel Archive, Windsor, MS XV.37.21  
 Stow, *Survey*, p. 169.  
 David Lewis, 'The Hospital of St Anthony of Vienne', *The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, eds, Caroline Barron and Matthew Davies, (London, 2007), p. 228-231.

### **St Augustine Papey**

- a. Map Index Number: 10 City of London Map

- b. Founder: Priests Thomas Symineson, William Cleve, William Barnaby and John Stafford and the Fraternity of St Charity and St John Evangelist
- c. Ongoing Administration: Fraternity of St Charity and St John Evangelist
- d. Almshouse Location: Opposite the end of St Mary Axe, by London Wall
- e. Foundation Date: 1442
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1442
- g. Last date active: 1548
- h. Residents: Blind and lame priests who could not work
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, food, shelter and the services of a barber and launder and someone to prepare food and drink.
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:
 

BL Ms Cotton Vitellius F XVI, fols 113–123

BL MS Harley 604 fol. 12 r-v

*London Consistory Court Wills 1492-1547*, ed. Ida Darlington, London Record Society (1967) 10, f.5v; 23, f.11v.

*London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, ed. C. J. Kitching, London Record Society 16 (1980), 34, 105

*Historical Collections of a Citizen of London in the Fifteenth Century*, ed James Gairdner, (London, 1876) pp. i – xli. <<http://www.british-history.ac.uk/camden-record-soc/vol17/i-xli>> [accessed 5<sup>th</sup> Feb 2016]

Stow, *Survey*, pp. 138, 150.

T. Hugo, 'The Hospital of Le Papey in the City of London', *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 5 (1877), pp. 183-221.

### **St Clements Dane's Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 36 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Unknown
- c. Ongoing Administration: Parish
- d. Almshouse Location: Churchyard of St Clements Dane Church in the City of Westminster
- e. Foundation Date: Unknown

- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1548
- g. Last date active: 1548
- h. Residents: Poor, unknown number
- i. Benefits: Rent
- j. Built Form: F
- k. Sources:  
*London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, ed, C. J. Kitching, London Record Society 16 (1980), 152.

### **St James' Westminster**

- a. Map Index Number: 15 Westminster Map
- b. Founder: Citizens of London
- c. Ongoing Administration: Royal – Master and almspeople appointed by King
- d. Almshouse Location: St James' Palace
- e. Foundation Date: Twelfth century as a leper hospital, became an almshouse between 1331 and 1450
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1319
- g. Last date active: 1536
- h. Residents: Alms sisters from 1449
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension and ale on St James' day
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:  
Eton College Archive, ECR61  
Gervase Rosser, *Medieval Westminster 1200 – 1540*, (Oxford, 2001), pp. 300 -310.  
*The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, Caroline Barron, and Matthew Davies eds., (London, 2007), pp. 177-181.

### **St Katharine's Hospital Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 2 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Queen Phillippa
- c. Ongoing Administration: Master appointed by the Queens of England
- d. Almshouse Location: Outside London Wall next to the Tower of London

- e. Foundation Date: 1354
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1354
- g. Last date active: Still active as a foundation
- h. Residents: 3 lay sisters and the 13 poor bedeswomen
- i. Benefits: Rent, Food and clothing
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:
 

Andrew Coltee Ducarel, *Bibliotheca Topographica Britannica. No V. Containing the History of the Royal Hospital and Collegiate Church of St Katharine, near the Tower of London* (London, 1782)

Catherine Jamison, *The History of the Royal Hospital of St Katharine, by the Tower of London* (London, 1952)

*The Religious Houses of London and Middlesex*, Caroline Barron, and Matthew Davies eds., (London, 2007), pp. 155-159.

### **St Mary Spital without Bishopsgate Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 21 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Unknown
- c. Ongoing Administration: Priory and hospital of St Mary Spital
- d. Almshouse Location: Bishopsgate Street, outside Bishopsgate
- e. Foundation Date: Probably beginning of sixteenth century
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1548
- g. Last date active: 1548
- h. Residents: Unknown
- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:
 

Stow, *Survey*, p. 356.

William Dugdale, *Monasticon Anglicanum* (London, 1693) p. 178.

Christopher Thomas, Barney Sloane and Christopher Philpotts, *The Excavations at the Priory of St Mary Spital* (London, 1997)

## St Michael Cornhill Almshouse

- a. Map Index Number: 39 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Unknown
- c. Ongoing Administration: Parish
- d. Almshouse Location: Unknown
- e. Foundation Date: After 1548
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1598
- g. Last date active: 1598
- h. Residents: Ancient, decayed parishioners and widows. Unknown number
- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: B
- k. Sources:
  - GL, MS 4070/1-2
  - GL MS 4072/1
  - Stow, *Survey*, p. 181.
  - London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, ed, C. J. Kitching, London Record Society 16 (1980) 11, 12.
  - Endowed Charities*, p. 312.
  - W. H. Overall, ed., *The Accounts of the Churchwardens of the Parish of St Michael, Cornhill, in the City of London, from 1456 to 1608. With miscellaneous memoranda continued in the great book of accounts, and extracts from the proceedings of the Vestry, from 1563 to 1607* (London, 1871)

## St Stephen's Westminster Almshouse

- a. Map Index Number: 29 Westminster Map
- b. Founder: John Chamber, Dean of the College of St Stephen and physician to Henry VIII
- c. Ongoing Administration: St Stephen's College
- d. Almshouse Location: St Stephen's College, Westminster
- e. Foundation Date: After 1514
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1548

- g. Last date active: 1548
- h. Residents: 8 poor people, men and women
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, fuel, clothing
- j. Built Form: A
- k. Sources:  
*London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, ed, C. J. Kitching, London Record Society 16 (1980), 190.

### **Sir Ambrose Nicholas' Almshouse (Salters')**

- a. Map Index Number: 48 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Sir Ambrose Nicholas
- c. Ongoing Administration: Salters' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: East side of Monkwell Street, Cripplegate
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1578
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1578
- g. Last date active: Still active, amalgamated with other Salters' company almshouse charities
- h. Residents: 12 poor, old people
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, fuel
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:  
TNA PROB 11/60  
Stow, *Survey*, p. 259.  
William Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London* 2 (London, 1834) p. 564.

### **Sir Martin Bowes' Almshouse (Goldsmiths')**

- a. Map Index Number: 43 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Sir Martin Bowes
- c. Ongoing Administration: Goldsmiths' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Goldsmiths' Hall
- e. Foundation Date: 1557
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1557

- g. Last date active: Unknown
- h. Residents: One almsman
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, clothing
- j. Built Form: E
- k. Sources:  
*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting II*, pp. 473-479.  
 William Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London 2* (London, 1838) p.259.  
*Endowed Charities*, p. 391.

### **Sir Thomas Gresham's Almshouse (Mercers' and City of London)**

- a. Map Index Number: 46 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Sir Thomas Gresham
- c. Ongoing Administration: Mercers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: East side of Broad Street behind Gresham's house in Bishopsgate Street.
- e. Foundation Date: 1568
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1575
- g. Last date active: Still active – different location
- h. Residents: 8 poor and impotent persons
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, fuel, clothing
- j. Built Form: D
- k. Sources:  
 TNA PROB 11/61/557  
 Stow, *Survey*, p. 82.  
*Endowed Charities*, pp. 256-259.  
 John William Burgon, *The life and times of Sir Thomas Gresham; comp. chiefly from his correspondence preserved in Her Majesty's state-paper office: including notices of many of his contemporaries*, 2 (London, 1839), p. 441.

### **Thomas Beaumont's Almshouse (Salters')**

- a. Map Index Number: 17 City of London Map

- b. Founder: Thomas Beaumont
- c. Ongoing Administration: Salters' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Parish of All Hallows Bread Street, next to Salters Hall
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1454
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1454
- g. Last date active: Re-founded after fire in 1666 but amalgamated with other Salters' almshouses. Still in operation
- h. Residents: 6 poor members of the Salters' Company, men and/or women
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension, coals
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:  
TNA PROB 11/4/179  
*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting II*, pp. 533-537.  
Stow, *Survey*, p. 295.  
*Endowed Charities*, p. 290-295.  
William Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London*, 2 (London, 1838), p. 564.

### **Thomas Cook's Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 19 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Thomas Cook
- c. Ongoing Administration: Executors
- d. Almshouse Location: Black Alley in the parish of All Hallows, London Wall
- e. Foundation Date: 1478
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1478
- g. Last date active: 1568 (if it was maintained as his will instructed)
- h. Residents: Six poor, infirm tenants
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:  
TNA PROB 11/6/467  
J. P. Williams, 'A Late-Medieval Family and its Archive: The Forsters of



London, c.1440-c.1550', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, Royal Holloway College, 2011) pp. 188-189.

### **Vintners' Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 11 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Unclear – attributed to Guy Shuldhham
- c. Ongoing Administration: Vintners' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: Vintry Ward, Stoddes (later Spital) Lane
- e. Foundation Date: Before 1446
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1446
- g. Last date active: 2013
- h. Residents: 13 poor men and women of the Vintners' Company
- i. Benefits: Rent, pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:

Vintners' Company Records, Guy Shuldhham's will  
*Endowed Charities*, pp. 444-448.  
*Cal. of Wills in Ct of Husting II*, pp. 473-479.  
William Herbert, *The History of the Twelve Great Livery Companies of London*, 2 (London, 1838) pp. 636-637.  
John Gough Nichols, 'The Muniments of the Vintners' Company',  
*Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*, 3 3  
(1870), pp. 432-447.

### **Westminster School Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 45 Westminster Map
- b. Founder: Elizabeth I
- c. Ongoing Administration: Westminster School
- d. Almshouse Location: Westminster School
- e. Foundation Date: 1560
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1560
- g. Last date active: 1633
- h. Residents: Old soldiers

- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: G
- k. Sources:
 

John Strype, *A Survey of the Cities of London and Westminster*, 6 (London, 1633), p. 29.

Rudolph Ackermann, *The History of Westminster School* (London, 1816), p. 7.

### **Whittington's Almshouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 6 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Richard Whittington
- c. Ongoing Administration: Mercers' Company
- d. Almshouse Location: College Hill, next to St Michael Paternoster Church
- e. Foundation Date: 1424
- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1424
- g. Last date active: Still active – different location
- h. Residents: Thirteen men or men with their wives, poor citizens of London
- i. Benefits: Rent, clothing, food, pension
- j. Built Form: C
- k. Sources:
 

Jean Imray, *The Charity of Richard Whittington: A History of the Trust administered by the Mercers' Company 1424 – 1966* (London, 1968),

*Calendar of Patent Rolls*, Henry VI 1429-1436, p. 215

*London and Middlesex Chantry Certificate 1548*, ed, C. J. Kitching, London Record Society 16 (1980), 96, 248.

Jordan, *Charities*, p. 278.

### **Whittington's Longhouse**

- a. Map Index Number: 5 City of London Map
- b. Founder: Richard Whittington
- c. Ongoing Administration: Parish of St Martin Vintry
- d. Almshouse Location: Tennis Court Dock, Vintry Ward
- e. Foundation Date: Possibly before Richard Whittington's Death 1424

- f. First Documentary Evidence: 1632
- g. Last date active: 1632
- h. Residents: Five poor people from the parish of St Martin Vintry
- i. Benefits: Unknown
- j. Built Form: B
- k. Sources:
  - GL *Vintry Ward, Wardmote inquest minutes and presentments*, 1687-1774
  - GL Viewers Reports, II, p. 89.
  - P. E. Jones, 'Whittington's Longhouse', *London Topographical Record*, 23 (1972) pp. 27-34.

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Harley Ms 604, fol. 12r-v A copy of part of the Cartulary of St Augustine Papey

Harley Ms 1498 Ordinances of Henry VII's Almshouse

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### **Lambeth Palace Library, London, SE1 7JU**

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CL/B/1/2 Court Orders Clothworkers' Company

CL/B/1/9, fol. 50<sup>v</sup> Clothworkers' Company Court Orders

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